# Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan

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# Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan

## THE CASE OF DAZAI OSAMU

*Alan Wolfe*

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*For my parents*
*Joseph and Lillian Wolfe*

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Suicide is art. . . . Suicide activates
a writer's entire works.
—Mishima Yukio, quoted in
Nakamura, *Taidan: ningen to bungaku*

If [there is] an essential relationship between
literature and suicide, the Japanese novel
and its authors are surely the most
representative case.
—Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*

[R]epresentations of death will always prove
. . . to be complex displacements of an
indirect, symbolic meditation about
*something else.*
—Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*

# *PREFACE*

TO MENTION suicide and Japan in the same sentence is to bring to bear a set of stereotypes that continue to shape Western perceptions of non-Western cultures. Although the historical realities of Japan remain recalcitrant to such efforts, it is clear that over the last century such superficial notions of cultural difference have continued to structure policies as well as popular attitudes about this nation that is on its way to becoming the dominant economic power of the twenty-first century.

The copulative conjunction, suicide and Japan, conjures up for most Westerners the image of the samurai male and his privileged mode of execution, *seppuku* or ritual suicide by disembowelment. Notwithstanding the very specific and limited, if fascinating, role of seppuku in Japanese history, the spectacular nature—including in the literal sense of public performance—of this act has understandably caused observers to extrapolate and identify certain of its aspects with the Japanese people as a whole. This tendency, as well as the resonances of the act when it occurs anachronistically in the twentieth century, has contributed to the process of cultural image-making about Japan from both without and within.

And yet, the prosaic facts of the matter are that suicide in Japan is essentially comparable as a sociological phenomenon to its manifestations in other advanced industrial societies. Indeed, the very banality of modern-day suicide in Japan, when juxtaposed with the spectacular images of kamikaze pilots and seppuku, becomes itself the generator of a new type of image, that of Japan as the supreme "postmodern" nation, an appellation that again teases us with its surface transparence and threatens us with its subtext of impenetrable (because inexplicable) opacity.

It is after all impossible to avoid the matter of sociology in relation to discussions of suicide, even when the case study is a literary one. In reading about suicide, suicidal writers, and suicide *in* literature, it becomes clear that the discourse on suicide and literature is necessarily informed by a certain tradition of studying suicide, which has its most familiar "paternity" in the work of Emile Durkheim, the first sociologist of suicide. At the same time, studies of suicide that are produced within that social science tradition may themselves be seen to borrow heavily from the strategies of literary narrative.

It is with the above observation in mind that this study investigates an apparent complicity between the sociological syndrome of suicidal alienation and the literary historical paradigm of the nonconformist autobiographical writer. Focusing on Japan in the twentieth century and on one

of its most famous literary suicides, this book argues that alienated intellectuals, writers, and artists become, by their very marginalization, emblematic indicators of that same modernity that oppresses them. The very notion of cultural modernization, calling for the production of an antihero, is rooted in a structural opposition pitting a Western concept of the individual as realized self and coherent subject against an Eastern absent self. The predisposition toward autobiographical fiction in the Japanese novel is symptomatic of a felt need to overcome this perceived aporia between an Eastern and a Western self.

The present study is offered, then, as an investigation of twentieth-century Japanese suicide, not as a sociological—even less a clinical—phenomenon, but as a cultural construct generated to a large extent by and about modern Japanese literature. It focuses on the life and writing of Dazai Osamu (1909–1948), not only a writer well known to the Japanese public, but one whose prominence as an object of study for literary critics and sociologists alike calls attention to the paradigmatic status of the suicidal writer in modern Japanese literary history. In many ways that will be demonstrated, Dazai may be said to serve the Japanese literary establishment as a representative scapegoat, and yet his texts reveal what might now be termed a "deconstructive edge" in that his posthumous status as a monument of negativity is already perceived and undone in his autobiographical narrative of suicides.

The particular relation between suicide and autobiographical fiction will be explored in Dazai's metaphorical interweaving of his fictional texts, as well as by a consideration of the analogous narrative presuppositions underlying suicide and autobiography in general. In contrast to the "genealogical closure" through which such Western critics as A. Alvarez seek to confer or claim privileged status for themselves by way of a romantic association with suicide, the Dazai text will be shown to resist such closure. The Dazai protagonist as well as Dazai the author-artist are simultaneously victim and victimizer, ultimately impotent to father or to control their own aftertext, its reading or rewriting.

Suicide relates to narrative in a way that has been little investigated, yet in a way that is most suggestively illuminated in the Japanese case. But suicide is also an implicit adjunct of the notion of national allegory, developed with particular attention by Fredric Jameson and others in relation to third world nations. The bivalent status of suicide, as it moves through Durkheimian analysis from private individual event to marker of national sociological trends, is of particular relevance in Japan, where (as in the West to a lesser extent) certain forms of suicide had already been recognized as indicators of class and even national distinction. The tradition of war-related or anachronistic suicides has—to use a narrative term—punctuated Japanese history from earliest times, with several cel-

ebrated instances of seppuku (including the 47 loyal retainers in 1703, General Nogi Maresuke and his wife Shizuko in 1912, and writer Mishima Yukio in 1970) being associated with appeals to a waning sense of national self-affirmation. One of the focal points of this book is the way in which such suicides play a role in the construction of Japan's twentieth-century narrative of modern development, with particular attention to how these stories interact with that other modern narrative of suicide—that inspired by Durkheim—to suggest a polarity of possible readings of postwar Japanese culture.

Dazai's distinctive version of suicidal autobiography will be analyzed in counterpoint to Western romantic notions of suicide and to Mishima's atavistic "postmodern" suicidal gesture. It will be argued that Dazai's deliberately fragmenting and antihistorical tendencies, and above all his narrative string of unmotivated suicides, may be read as a "deconstruction" of the symbolic synthesis of prewar-postwar coherence resurrected by modernization theory. That synthesis, broadly sketched, posits a revisionist view of what had been described in quasi-biblical terms as Japan's prewar "barrenness," to the effect that the prewar and war period should be perceived as a (narrative) deviation whose "redirection" on the course of democratic capitalism after the war confirms the "correctness" of the modernization narrative as a whole.

In order to make the case for a suicidal autobiography, it is necessary to take into account the particular nature of Japan's semi-autonomous literary development in the twentieth century. Specifically at issue is the status of the distinctive narrative form known as the *shishōsetsu* or I-novel. It is no accident that Dazai has been labeled the "last of the I-novelists." The turn among writers in this genre from a European naturalist concern with social justice to a tedious preoccupation with their own middle-aged male writers' domestic and sexual obsessions could only invite the type of closure promised by suicide. Yet the I-novel as autobiographical fiction may also be said to realize what is implicit in all autobiography (if not, indeed, in all narrative)—the need to bring the author's (life-) narrative to a coherent end. What may make the critic want to see Dazai as the preeminent I-novelist is perhaps, ironically, the way in which Dazai's texts resist reading him and them as the culmination of an I-novel tradition implying closure and resolution of the gaps (East/West, self/other, modern/premodern) that continue to structure Japanese intellectual life. If his writing may be seen less as autobiography than as what Michel Beaujour calls "self-portrait," a genre that denies the very possibility of self-representation, then perhaps we may better understand how Dazai's very use of suicidal narrative allows him, as it were, to take his autobiographical fiction "beyond death" and thus to tease his critics for their irrepressible attempts to equate themselves with the gods.

Acknowledgments are both intellectual and personal and cover many years of grappling with issues between and across cultures. They include various debts of gratitude and appreciation for inspiration, encouragement, and support to Brett de Bary, Karen Brazell, Princeton editor Cathie Brettschneider, Bruce Cumings, Carol Gluck, Harry Harootunian, Donald Keene, Victor Koschmann, Mary Layoun, Masao Miyoshi, Jonathan Monroe, Thomas Rimer, Cheyney Ryan, William Sibley, and Irving Wohlfarth. Above all, my expression of gratitude, with deepest affection, goes to those closest, to my wife Marie-Pierre, and to my two children, Mikael and Marika, for their patience, understanding, and support.

I would like to emphasize the debt and sense of respect I feel toward the scholars whose work I discuss. My sometimes argumentative readings of their work are recognition of the inspiration they have offered me and, I hope, an indication of the seriousness with which I believe they should be read. Engaging in serious discussion is the path to more productive and stimulating exchanges, and toward this goal I take the present occasion to offer my gratitude to those from whom I have learned so much.

Acknowledgment is also due the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, which has kindly permitted publication of a revision of my article "Suicide and the Japanese Postmodern: A Postnarrative Paradigm?" [*SAQ* 87 (July 1988): 571–589; copyright 1988 by Duke University Press], which now appears as the Epilogue in this book. The revisions of the study from its dissertation form also benefited from research I was able to carry out over the past few years on related projects under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council, the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, and the Center for the Humanities at the University of Oregon. Thanks are also due the East Asian Institute of Columbia University for its inclusion of this book in its Studies of the East Asian Institute.

Translations from Japanese and French are my own, except where attributed to English-language publications or unless otherwise indicated.

# Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan

# *Introduction*

## SAINT OF NEGATIVITY

There is nowadays a sort of inverse glory . . . a
cherished moral depravity which we impose on our
heroes to connect them with our times.
—Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*

ONE of the paradoxes of Japan in the twentieth century is how little even educated Westerners know of Japan's voluminous and diverse literary culture in spite of considerable awareness of Japan as a factor in their daily economic life and patterns of behavior. Nor does the significant increase in translations and studies in English seem to have had much of an impact in this area. Accordingly, a book such as the present one, which seeks to reach beyond the borders of "Japanology," must assume limited familiarity with even as prominently translated and studied a writer as Dazai Osamu.

The very history of Dazai's introduction to the West is suggestive of the paradox involved here. If any Japanese literary names are known outside Japan, they are most likely to be Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), the only Japanese winner of the Nobel Prize for literature (in 1968), and Mishima Yukio (1925–1970), notorious at least as much for his spectacular life-style (combining sadomasochistic homoeroticism and reverent adulation of Western culture with militaristic ultranationalism) and his sensationalistic suicide (by seppuku in the wake of an abortive military coup) as for his prodigious literary and artistic activities.

Although both these authors have had some of their major writings translated, there have been surprisingly few Western studies of their work.[1] Given, in addition, the relative paucity of critical studies in English on Japanese literature in general, one may wonder about the existence of a relatively large number of studies on or including Dazai Osamu, whose name is even less familiar to Western readers.[2] The irony is rendered especially acute when we consider the more fragmented and dissolute nature of Dazai's life and writing, as well as the less than certain circumstances surrounding his suicide in comparison with the deaths of Kawabata and Mishima. Both of the latter, while diametrically opposed in life and in death, enacted suicides that offered critics a narrative closure befitting their lives and oeuvres. Thus, while Mishima was made to seem the antimodernist par excellence, dying a traditional death in pro-

test against a homogenizing modernity, Kawabata (with his "quiet" suicide) was enshrined as the venerable curator of the traditional esthetic essence of Japan, secret, mysterious, and impenetrable to the end.

If these rich subjects of a certain renown in the West have not as yet occasioned major studies, then how is it that the lesser known Dazai has gained relatively greater attention? A good part of the explanation may lie in the fortuitous presence of the American Occupation in Japan in the immediate postwar period, a presence that enabled the few Americans equipped with the requisite linguistic skills and cultural sensitivity to register the turbulent reactions to postwar life that appeared through the texts and personae of Japanese writers such as Dazai, whose notoriety was then coincidentally at its peak. A secondary factor here may have been the role of the resurrected postwar literary establishment, the *bundan*, that amorphous conjuncture of circumstances bringing together Japanese publishers, critics, scholars, journalists, and writers, and whose consensual judgment resulted in the ultimate cast of characters, scripts, and tone of the postwar literary scene that the foreign critic observed.

Dazai's emergence as the earliest postwar manifestation of the genuinely alienated writer may best be seen as part of the effort, by both Japanese and Western critics, to re-present a recently militarist Japan as a "human" society, sharing a universal humanity with the West. The frequent parallels drawn between Dazai and Dostoevsky, Kafka, or Camus are also part of this process at a vital juncture, the late 1940s and 1950s. It is somewhat ironic that these comparisons had as their intent to project an "individuality" and "nonconformism" to counter the image of a robotic collective Japan while the existentialist Western writers invoked were concerned to dramatize the oppression of their "modern" societies.

This very type of disparity may nonetheless serve as a tool for our own critical reevaluation and rereading of Dazai within the framework of modern Japanese literary history. Before undertaking this project, however, it is necessary, in the light of the dilemma outlined above, and at the risk of reinforcing the paradox of Dazai in the West, to provide an account of his life. And although this narrative, it should be warned, may be an indispensable subtext for the discussion that follows, its very coherence should be rendered suspect by the use of Dazai's own texts as well as by his explicit admonition that "the only true facts are birth and death."

## Subtext: Between the Facts

> The only true facts are birth and death.
> —Dazai Osamu, "Regression"

Dazai Osamu was born Tsushima Shūji on June 19, 1909, in the town of Kanagi in Aomori Prefecture in the north of Japan. His father Gen'emon,

a wealthy landholder, enjoyed the privilege of being a member of the House of Peers and spent much of his time in Tokyo, where he died in 1923 at the age of fifty-one. Dazai's mother Tane was apparently frail and unable or unwilling to nurse or devote much attention to her eighth child. At the time of his birth, Dazai's family consisted of about thirty persons, including servants. The immediate family consisted of three brothers (two others had died), four sisters, a great-grandmother, a grandmother, and an aunt with four daughters. A younger brother, Reiji, with whom Dazai became quite close until Reiji's death at age sixteen, was born in 1912.

Dazai's early life, recounted in "Reminiscences," was characterized by considerable insecurity over his status in the family. While still a child he came to doubt whether he was really his parents' son at all. Having been handed to a wet nurse at birth, and thereafter given over to the care of his aunt Kie and then a guardian, Take, until the age of eight, and intensely aware of his parents' indifference throughout, he understandably questioned the circumstances of his birth.

> As a child I felt that I was unfairly treated; I used to think that I wasn't the legitimate child of my mother and father. It seemed to me that I was an outcast among my brothers. Because I was ugly I was teased by everyone, which is maybe why I came to feel excluded. I would search the house for papers related to my birth. I couldn't find anything. I even discreetly questioned the people who had been visiting our house from before my birth to see if they could recall the actual day I was born. This made them laugh, although they said they remembered it perfectly.[3]

In 1916, at age seven, Dazai entered Kanagi Elementary School where, in spite of frequent absences due to poor health, his performance was rated highly. He subsequently attended a special school where he prepared to take entrance exams for Aomori Middle School, which he began attending in April 1923 at the age of fourteen, one month after his father's death. In his second year of middle school he began writing fiction while collaborating with several friends on the publication of a series of school literary magazines.

Dazai attended high school at Hirosaki, where he was exposed to the currents of Marxist thought sweeping Japan, and soon sweeping him and his friends and along with it. The critic Kamei Katsuichirō describes the feeling with which Dazai and other young Japanese heard "the footsteps of revolution." The success of the Russian Revolution in 1917 had given persuasive force to communism in Japan, and Marxism was passionately espoused by many young Japanese. In the context of political and economic corruption that characterized Japan in the 1920s, Marxism filled an apparent ethical void seen to extend back to Meiji times. Christianity, an early force for democracy in the Meiji period, had by the beginning of

the Showa period (1926–1989) lost its appeal. Communism, in Kamei's view, was received as a quasi-religious force, and, as formalistic as it seemed as a political movement, the youthful passion that it inspired was above all ethical.[4]

Hirosaki was also a town out of the romantic feudal past, where Dazai imbibed not only of political thought, but of the poetry of Japan's earliest imperial anthology the *Man'yōshū*, the music of the Gidayū ballads, and the writings of authors ranging from Izumi Kyōka (1873–1939) to Pushkin and Dostoevsky, and to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927), whose death during this period influenced him profoundly. The suicide of Akutagawa, who described his own disenchantment with life as a "vague anxiety," suggested itself as "the only proper death for a writer."[5]

The association of death with a writer's life appealed to the young Dazai's already budding romantic notions of art and genius and was further enhanced through Marxist thought and left-wing activities. Introduced to a secret leftist group by a friend, Dazai was taken more by the notion of the inevitable "perishing" of the ruling class than by the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. At age nineteen and the best dressed student in his high school, he was intensely aware of his family's wealth—the pretentious art, the solely decorative piano—and he saw the origin of their fortune as stemming from the family's position as landlords exploiting tenant farmers.[6]

Death momentarily receded into the background as Dazai channeled his rebellion into intense literary activity. In the late 1920s, he published a number of stories and novels in a literary magazine he and his friends ran at school. His novelistic "exposés of landholders" were clearly based on and directed toward his own family and self. "Hell Without End," for example, was a description of Dazai's childhood similar to the later "Reminiscences," except that it emphasized only the darker side of his family and vilified his father in particular. The hero is the landlord's son, secretly in love with an attractive, diffident servant girl (not unlike the Miyo of his autobiographical "Reminiscences"). He is horrified as he sees her being forced into the role of his father's mistress, subsequent to which she goes mad and dies. Dazai thus implicitly makes himself a rival of his landlord-politician father, transforming his hostility toward his own father into revolt against both family and class. It is thus that he begins to identify romantically with the struggle of the poor and the oppressed.

Several of Dazai's friends at school, heavily involved in political activities, were suspended or arrested. Dazai later wrote that his own commitment was tarnished by his "aristocratic" background, which made him unqualified to be a communist. This realization, he maintains, led him to attempt suicide by taking drugs in December of 1929, his first of at least five such tries, this one not even requiring hospitalization.

Apparently the incident was not overly traumatic. Dazai began to write and to be active politically, claiming to be "reborn" with the resolve to devote his literary talent to "serving the people." "A Landlord's Life" was his major effort at proletarian literature. According to critic Okuno Takeo, the protagonist is "unimaginably diabolical," the classical evil landlord who is unmoved even by the death of a servant woman who contracted her fatal venereal disease from him.[7] The concept of "service" that Dazai had acquired now found its true object in the "people," with whom he sought to become one. In "They and Their Beloved Mother," written in 1928, he imagines himself as the son of a poor family, his hatred directed toward the landlords, oppressors of the people.

Throughout these political writings, Dazai projects a sense of futility that he seeks to locate in his early home life. In the fragment "Pitiful Mosquito," which he wrote while in high school and later included in "Leaves," the first selection of his collection *Declining Years*, Dazai described the two oldest women of his family, his grandmother and great-grandmother, as family ghosts materializing the gloom of the house and imposing on him, the grandson, a destiny of sadness. Dazai recalls the two old women clinging tenaciously to life, fondling him and implanting within him that "feeling of futility" that was to haunt him throughout life. Later on he referred to this story, written at age nineteen, as the "key to my chaotic life" and "the source of my nihilism."[8]

As Dazai entered Tokyo Imperial University in April 1930, Tokyo appeared to him as a "white neon forest." The Ginza called to mind "a wild dance of despair" on the eve of the Manchurian Incident of 1931.[9]

> The society Dazai saw as he arrived in Tokyo was in this decadent state of affairs: the ruling class of Japan, allied with the military cliques, were secretly preparing to invade Manchuria; the large gears of politics were beginning to move toward war. And in the rampant despair and painless decadence of people who did not even try to prevent this movement, he saw a caricature of his past self. Undoubtedly he believed that only communism would set things straight. . . . Shortly after his arrival in Tokyo, he plunged into left-wing underground activities.[10]

Dazai's involvement in revolutionary activities was not only an outgrowth of his desire to be of "service to the people"; it was also a reflection of his need to destroy his "old" aristocratic self. As part of this process, it became necessary for him to reject literature as well.

> An artistic movement is a splendid refuge from class struggle. Art, and literature in particular, cannot train revolutionaries. It produces only romantic, and therefore ruined, transparent revolutionaries. Sympathizers—yes, these can be created even through literature. And the support of these sympathiz-

> ers is very important. But for this purpose there are surer, more effective, and certainly cheaper means than literature: persistent propaganda, and other kinds of agitation in groups, meetings, and the like.[11]

It was now inconsistent to be writing fashionable proletarian literature and brandishing one's privileged consciousness as a writer. Convinced of the ultimate irrelevance of literature, Dazai became "a purely political person,"[12] writing no more until his "defection" (*tenkō*) from the movement over a year later.

The Communist Party in Japan in 1930 was suffering persecution and close police surveillance while trying to reconstruct itself for what proved to be its last effective prewar spurt of activity.[13] Groups directly connected to or in sympathy with the Party were active on the campus of Tokyo University as well. Dazai, from a postwar and more disillusioned perspective, facetiously describes his experience at one such meeting of a Marxist Reading Group in *No Longer Human*.[14] His activities ranged from donating his stipend from home to helping needy comrades with lodging and food and providing aliases and covers when the movement was underground.

During this same period, in 1930, Dazai sent for Oyama Hatsuyo, a young geisha he had known in Aomori, who came and lived with him in Tokyo. She seemed sympathetic to his activities and friends, who encouraged their marriage. The apparent harmony of "love and revolution" Dazai here enjoyed was short-lived. He felt he had to entrust Hatsuyo to the care of his oldest brother Bunji, who as head of the family had essentially commanded Dazai to give her up in order to protect the family from scandal. Meanwhile, the Party was losing its top leadership to arrests and defections.

It was at this juncture that Dazai met Tanabe Shimeko, a barmaid at the Hollywood, a Ginza cafe. A week after they met, on November 28, they spent a drunken night at the Teikoku Hotel, and on the evening of the twenty-ninth, they attempted double suicide by drowning near Kamakura. She succeeded, and he did not. He was questioned but released immediately because of his family's prominence, and with the implicit understanding that he, as a young male of high birth, could not be blamed for the death of a woman, especially a barmaid.

Dazai himself said that the most immediate cause for this attempted suicide was his alienation from his family due to the Hatsuyo affair.[15] Meanwhile, he did receive permission from his brother to marry her. Biographer Saegusa Yasutaka suggests that the increasing sense of desperation and failure pervading the left-wing movement and Dazai's corresponding disillusionment with it may have been related to his alienation from his family.[16] It was also in part, however, to escape that

alienation that he involved himself in revolutionary activities. Yet, as he was only too well aware, his leftist activities were financed by his allowance from home. In addition to this class-based dilemma, he was troubled by his attraction to dissipation and wanton pleasure and by his dislike for the discipline of the Party. Throughout his association with leftist politics, Dazai remained a sympathizer, never becoming a Party member. He rationalized his dispassion by saying he was unable to condone what seemed to him the "inhuman" tendencies of the Party, although he never rejected the "correctness" of communism.[17]

If communism was not the answer, it did provide a justification for a way out of his dilemma that appealed much more to his literary tastes: self-destruction offered a means of facilitating the inevitable role he had to play as one of those "doomed people" of the ruling class.

> Dazai's fringe participation in the left wing was an action of self-negation. His real intention was not the high motivation of a revolutionary but an acute form of his own downfall and destruction. It could be called a form of suicide. The peculiar nature of the link between Dazai and his age was due to a process of self-negation, in which he used a revolutionary movement as a means of self-persecution.
>
> He soon alienated himself from this movement by defection, but his motivation for leaving was probably pretty much the same as when he joined. He was never interested in obtaining political power as a revolutionary, only in "destroying himself." One might say that it was for "death" that he joined the movement and it was for "death" that he left it.[18]

This was neither the first nor the last time Dazai failed to do away with himself. He returned not only to life but to love and to the revolution as well. His union with Hatsuyo was arranged by Bunji, and he continued his underground activities for almost two years until late in 1932. The chaos of his personal life during what he called a "period of foolishness"[19] was paralleled by the increasing weakness and adventurism of the Party, its splitting into groups, and its infiltration by government spies. Saegusa believes that Dazai was indirectly involved in the Ōmori Gang bank robbery of October 6, 1932.[20] In any event, the summer before, Dazai had already made a decisive step toward final dissociation from the movement. He gave himself up to the police, who were not all that interested in him anyway. He did this, moreover, soon after discovering Hatsuyo's past infidelities. By the autumn of 1932, he was writing again.

The next few years involved intense literary activity, resulting in the collection, *Declining Years*.

> Ten years of my life I consecrated to this one volume of stories. For ten full years I did not know what it was to eat the cheerful breakfast of the good citizen. For the sake of this single volume I came to doubt my very existence: I wandered around in a daze, in perpetual pain, my self-esteem buffeted by the cold winds of the world. I squandered large amounts of money. I could not hold my head up to my brother, knowing the hardships I had inflicted on him. I burnt my tongue, wore out my heart, and deliberately harmed my body beyond all possibility of recovery. I tore up and discarded over a hundred stories. I ran through 50,000 sheets of manuscript paper. And all that remained was this one meager volume. Nothing else. The manuscript came to almost 600 pages, but the fee was a little more than sixty yen. Yet I believe in it. I believe that *Declining Years* will take on more resonance as time goes on, that it will absorb your eyes and penetrate ever deeper into your heart. I was born only to write this one book.[21]

On March 15, 1935, after failing an employment exam for a city newspaper, Dazai returned to Kamakura, the scene of his double suicide fiasco in 1930, and, according to his own account, tried to hang himself. With a rope burn to show for it, he returned to Tokyo where he dropped out of the university for good, only to suffer a severe attack of appendicitis two weeks later and to be diagnosed as having symptoms of tuberculosis. During treatment, which included stays at various hospitals and liberal prescriptions of painkillers, Dazai developed an addiction to drugs.

During his period of convalescence in the residential area of Funabashi, where he stayed until October of 1936, *Declining Years* was published, and Dazai began to gain a reputation as a writer. In August of 1935, thanks to the efforts of devoted friends during his internment, he was nominated for the first Akutagawa prize. It was his story "Regression" that brought him second prize. In spite of this success, his physical and financial condition declined. The remittances he received from home as well as the income from his stories went for drugs. At the urging of his mentor, writer Ibuse Masuji, Dazai allowed himself to be committed to the Musashino Hospital for what he thought was medical treatment. His shock at finding himself in a cell in a mental institution, where he remained for a month, shook his confidence in his friends and caused him deep hurt. "This internment determined the rest of my life."[22] The literary result was a controversial work to which he gave the English title "Human Lost." In the spring of 1937, Dazai discovered that during his hospitalization Hatsuyo had been having an affair with an acquaintance of his. A fourth abortive suicide, this time together with Hatsuyo, whose lover had disappeared, took place in March and was followed by a final separation.

From April 1937 to September 1938, Dazai lapsed into almost total

inactivity. He lived alone, saw few friends, drank, and ruminated on his public image. When he emerged from this temporary retirement, he seemed to be ready for a period of bourgeois domesticity. And, indeed, from 1938 until the end of the war in 1945, Dazai's life and writing reflected a marked contrast to the preceding period. At the age of thirty he seemed to have taken a sudden leap from the turbulence of youth into the stolidity of middle age. Stability and health were now a part of his public image. Comfortably ensconced in what critics refer to as his "bourgeois period," Dazai's purpose now was to write earnestly in order "to go on living."[23] With the traumatic Hatsuyo affair out of the way, he allowed his friends to marry him off to Ishihara Michiko on January 8, 1939. For two years, as the Pacific War headed toward Pearl Harbor, Dazai wrote more cheerful, if less intense, works.

As the war intensified, Dazai, notwithstanding his left-wing past, began to feel spasms of patriotism and attempted to join the government's contingent of writer-soldiers and war correspondents. Refused because of his poor health, however, he had to content himself with seeing friends of his off to the front. Not willing to write war propaganda, or to resist the severe government-imposed censorship, Dazai turned to producing a steady stream of historical pieces, retold fairy tales, and reinterpreted Western stories and legends.

In the spring of 1945, Japan's nearly total defeat became real for most Japanese. American bombing began to take its toll. On March 10, Tokyo was bombed. Dazai evacuated his wife and two young children to Michiko's hometown of Kōfu, and none too soon. On April 2, their house in Tokyo was destroyed. Dazai, who had returned alone to Tokyo, retreated to a bomb shelter, soon after rejoining Michiko in Kōfu. On July 7, the house in Kōfu was burned. On July 28, as the situation deteriorated even further, Dazai set out with Michiko and the children to Tsugaru in the deep north, to his birthplace in Kanagi, where he hoped for a reconciliation with his family.

The last few years of Dazai's life saw him return to a state of frantic activity reminiscent of his prewar years. This time, however, he was not alone. All of Japan seemed to share his schizophrenic hysteria. Dazai returned to Tokyo in November 1946. His attempt at reconciliation with his family had failed. His mother and grandmother had died. And his surviving brothers could not be said to be fond of him.

Back in tumultuous postwar Tokyo, Dazai renounced his good citizen and family man image. After an initial "optimistic" postwar work, "Pandora's Box" (1945), written while still in Kanagi, he began a series of stories reflecting his conviction that "family happiness is the source of all evil."[24] He spent on drink and other women money that should have gone to support his wife and children. His affair with Ōta Shizuko, which

he had initiated years before and resumed in February of 1947, led to his writing a major novel, *The Setting Sun*, based on her diary, as well as to the birth of an illegitimate daughter in November. Dazai also began seeing Yamazaki Tomie, a war widow who worked in a beauty salon. While with her, he wrote another novel, *No Longer Human*, began his last, unfinished work, "Good-bye," and entertained thoughts of double suicide, which led to both of them dying on June 16, 1948.

Appropriately enough, given Dazai's history of suicide attempts, this final act is subject to some doubt.[25] There were rumors that Dazai was the victim of a homicide carried out by his lover Tomie. The basis for this theory consisted of unconfirmed reports, denied by the police, that signs on the corpse indicated possible strangulation. There were also said to be traces of *geta* (wooden clogs) in the sand, indicating that Dazai might have been dragged into the water. The homicide theory is reinforced by the realization that Dazai's unfinished work, ominously titled in English "Good-bye," was not a farewell to life, as might lend credence to the suicide theory, but rather a farewell to "women." Accordingly, it is proposed that Tomie, sensing a separation, might have lured Dazai to his death. He may have gone along unsuspectingly, or he may have let himself be led, and then resisted, only to be subdued by her determination. Presumably, though, he was in a state of health and mind that would not have discouraged compliance. He may also have been drinking. A writer of similar tendencies, Sakaguchi Ango, invoking Dazai's tendency toward alcoholic depression, called it a "hangover suicide."[26]

The impact of Dazai's death was immediate and profound (the body was discovered on June 19, his thirty-ninth birthday), the news of it precipitating a flood of public eulogies of a most intimate variety. There were few who failed to attach significance to the fact of Dazai's death coming at this juncture of the postwar period. There were many, especially among the young, whose identification with Dazai was intensified with his death, some to the point of considering or actually committing suicide themselves. For them there was little doubt about Dazai's death being a deliberate suicide. It seemed reasonable enough, and it was esthetically irresistible, that Dazai should have completed his lifework with his own death. Coming as it did at the peak of his life and career, and at a time of national trauma, Dazai's apparent suicide provided Japan with a human symbol of despair that set into bold relief the shadow lurking behind the optimism of postwar reconstruction.

## Critical Connections

Dazai has exercised a peculiar fascination for the Japanese literary establishment. It is tempting to attribute this critical attention to a cynical

capitalization of his sensationalistic life-style. It is no less tempting to see certain postwar critics using Dazai and other "nihilistic" writers to displace a sense of guilt for having recanted their own leftist ideals in the 1930s, or to deflect their own sense of impotence before the onslaught of authority, direct in the case of the militarists and police repression before 1945, and implicit in the case of the Occupation and postwar conservative dominance. The result of the former, a guilty conscience, tends to make Dazai into a "scapegoat" as a self-destructive and failed revolutionary for the defeat of the left.

> Dazai's fringe participation in the left wing was an act of self-negation. . . . His real motivation was to achieve a form of radical self-destruction through degradation. . . . Herein lies the peculiar nature of the link between Dazai and his age: revolution as a means of self-flagellation.[27]

Another type of critic, reflecting a sense of futility, yields a transcendent, apostolic Dazai as "saint of negativity."[28] In sum, the critic invariably relies on a psychological analysis derived from Dazai's quasi-autobiographical writings, eminently suited for documenting the divergent details needed to compose the image.

One of the assumptions of the present study is that a literary corpus inevitably provides the raw material for that critical process of "monument building," whereby coherent meaning is attached to a text or a writer's work.[29] Dazai's oeuvre seems to lend itself to this process in exemplary fashion, spanning as it does the most turbulent and "opaque" period of Japan's modern history, the 1930s and 1940s. The themes of negativity, escape, revolt, identity crisis, alienation, and so forth, are incorporated into Dazai's decadent superstar image from 1945 on, monumentalized with his sensational "love suicide" in June 1948, and conveniently resurrected in his retrospectively youthful aberrations during the "dark valley" of Japanese militarism in the 1930s.

Tracing Dazai's literary endeavors from his high school days of socialist realism through to his nihilistic novels of the late 1940s, the critical process erects a model of negative sensitivity, a refined esthetic turned against whatever the dominant trend happens to be. Dazai the man, like the historical Buddha, becomes an overdetermined sign, laden with past, future, and transcendent incarnations. Like the cosmic Buddha, Dazai is both extrinsic, as a guide to a wayward, youthful flock, and immanent, within the negativity in each and all of us. As such, he comes to have meaning beyond his actual life and writing, becoming an allegorical hero of revolt, part of a modern myth of negativity. The myth is complex and has important ramifications in contemporary images of Japan, not the least of which is the privileged status of the "alienated writer" as paradigmatic of the modernization process.

Undoing a particular meaning can result only in its replacement by another meaning. To demonstrate that the real Dazai could not have been an allegorical hero of negativity, that his works do not add up to a coherent image, can be accomplished only by creating a fragmented, contradictory reading that yields yet another paradigm of the modernist variety, consonant with the fates of such monuments of "meaninglessness" as Joyce and Beckett. That fate is of course to express with exemplary "coherence" the inherent "absurdity" of *the* modern predicament. The result is that familiar self-satisfied assurance which comes from having converted meaninglessness into meaning: the security of knowing that we have understood the irrationality of the world. In Jonathan Culler's words, "We can always make the meaningless meaningful by production of an appropriate context."[30]

To speak of Dazai as a Japanese poststructuralist *avant la lettre* may be presumptuous, yet Dazai's particular brand of self-awareness may be said to point to that process whereby meaning continuously coalesces and dissolves. The present reading of Dazai within the panorama of Japanese literature will not seek to *affirm* any impossibility of meaning but rather to reveal the insubstantial, shadowy, kaleidoscopic bases on which apparent meaning is constructed. Thus Dazai will be seen above all as a convenient construct revealing certain underlying premises of Japanese literary studies. For this reason, the focus will be on those aspects of the Dazai phenomenon that call into question those same conditions which make writer and text into an emblem of Japanese cultural production.

The frameworks of presentation and the critical approaches within which Dazai is introduced inevitably reveal a spectrum of assumptions about Japanese society and Japan as a twentieth-century polity. In the case of Dazai, there is a significant merging of the sociological syndrome of alienation and the literary historical paradigm of the nonconformist writer as hero to yield the cultural indicator of successful modernization par excellence, the alienated artist or intellectual. The result is a criticism that tends to take for granted a "history" of "modern" Japanese literature into which it "fits" the lives and works of individual "modern" writers. The case of Dazai Osamu may be said both—and simultaneously—to constitute and to undermine the very notion of coherent modernity with which this array of producers of the "modern text of Japan" have brought forth this foremost of "non-Western miracles."

Thus, although the study of Dazai (and his writing) as a persona in Japanese literary history and culture will form a critical focal point in this book, it will also be tangential to two other interrelated theoretical concerns: a cross-cultural interrogation of notions of national narrative, with particular attention to the role of modernization as "metanarrative"; and the relation between suicide and writing, with a focus on literary suicide

as the logical culmination of autobiography and autobiographical fiction, especially as developed in the Japanese prototype known as the I-novel. Studies of Japanese literature and culture tend to overlook parallelisms in the dominant readings of modern Japanese history and modern Japanese literary development, parallelisms that result from a mutual or shared set of narrative imperatives deriving from Western beliefs in modernization as a distinct, linear, and teleological process. Thus, for example, the development of the Japanese novel tends to be seen in terms of criteria assumed to be the determinants of value for nineteenth- and twentieth-century European fiction, so that individual works are often judged on the basis of whether or not they conform to those criteria. But the same assumptions are at work even when a case is made for a distinctively Japanese narrative mode, one for which it is claimed that uniquely traditional features are at work, and whereby, some imply, the Japanese *shōsetsu* (novel, fiction) emerges as not only different but indeed superior.

The view underlying the present study is that neither of these positions is right or wrong, but that both imply very committed ideological choices, whether they are consciously expressed or not. That Japanese writing in the twentieth century is a product of interaction between what was going on in Japan and what was coming into public consciousness from the outside seems beyond dispute, just as does the recognition that writers and critics grappled with problems of definition, language, style, and the changing world around them. What the following pages seek to do is to make explicit the nature of these choices in discussions of Japanese culture and literature. And the way in which it seeks to do so is by bringing attention to bear on one particular node of apparent cultural difference, the act and status of suicide, or what we will call a "problematic" surrounding attitudes toward suicide. Suicide appears to be universal and yet to carry with it—even more than the rituals and institutions surrounding birth, sex, marriage, or death—a decisive charge of cultural identity and difference. Suicide appears to be clear-cut as a phenomenon and to constitute one of the most private of all acts, and yet the very ambiguity surrounding its determination and interpretation speaks rather to its nature as narrative, which suggests the incipient public tenor of even the most private suicides.

The implications of suicide as a narrative construct as well as a component of the imagination lead to a radical questioning of narratives of suicide in both the realms of social science and of literature. At the same time, the central role of studies of suicide (in both literary Romanticism and Durkheimian sociology) in the construction of a modern subjective identity pushes us to question further the relation between suicide and writing. The repeated narratives of suicide in Japanese literature are too

readily offered as testimonial evidence for the hidden motivation underlying the social science data of suicidology. Examined in tandem with literary narratives documenting the ostensible failure of the individual to adapt to "modern" society, suicidal narratives provide us with a revealing shift in register, whereby the dry clinical data of nameless alienated individuals become indicators of a high level of cultural and psychological sensitivity, thus ironically reinforcing the notion of a successful modernization.

Given the emphasis on cultural criteria relating to "individualization," or the production of "free" individuals, as determinants of successful modernization in the case of "non-Western nations," there may be good reason to wonder what role the development of a "modern" suicidal narrative has played in that success story. The irony is especially apparent in the case of Japan, not only in the way it appears to match a Western model of modernization even in its "negative sectors," but also in the lingering echoes of a suicidal tradition that seems to argue for genuine and irreducible difference. Thus the narrative of modern suicide in Japan is always seen, both within and outside Japan, to comport a hidden subnarrative of seppuku, whose prior glorious overtones are in the modern period associated with a recidivistic primitivism shunned by modern capitalism. The fear generated by such anachronistic instances of seppuku as General Nogi's in 1912 and Mishima Yukio's in 1970 suggests the hidden bipolarity structuring Japan's cultural self-image, enhanced all the more in the late twentieth century by the persisting afterimages of World War II kamikaze suicides.

It is, above all, this perception of suicide as an imaginative construct and as a multivalent narrative that underlies the choice of Dazai Osamu as a focal point. Dazai's life and writing may themselves be seen as a self-conscious effort to question the set of narratives that constitute Japanese modernity. Without claiming intent or prescience on the part of the author Dazai, it will be argued that texts by and about Dazai produce a conflict of interpretation that set them against the general view of Dazai as a modern yet prototypically Japanese persona. Moreover, the prominence of "modern" literary suicides (Akutagawa, Dazai, Kawabata) in counterpoint to Mishima's "traditional" suicide tends to favor late capitalist Japan's efforts to repress the unpleasant associations with the past proffered by Mishima.

The topic of suicide in relation to writing has received surprisingly little attention in literary criticism. Even thematic treatments of "suicidal writers" or "literature and suicide" have had significantly less to do with writing as a narrative act than they have with psychobiographical reconstruction or with socio-philosophical ruminations on death. A. Alvarez takes pains to distinguish his *Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (1973) from

other major studies of suicide in relation to literature and philosophy, including Henry Romilly Fedden's *Suicide: A Social and Historical Study* (1938) and Jacques Monférier's *Le Suicide* (1970). Alvarez writes "from the perspective of literature" and deals with "creative people" (xi), but his study maintains the dichotomy implicit in his enterprise: suicide *and* literature, not suicide *as* literature.

The focus of investigation in the present study is the textuality of suicide. The very paradox whereby criticism generates its own narratives of suicide may be said to derive from the status of suicide as text. Unlike the constative facticity of "death," the determination of suicide relies on a set of narrative and rhetorical devices manipulated to convince the reader/listener of an irrevocable intention to die. The ultimate undecidability of this intention may be said, as in much textual construction, simultaneously to constitute and to undermine the text of suicide.

In examining this problematic of suicide and writing in a comparative East-West context, two related issues are relevant: first, as touched on above, the way in which Japanese literature tends to be read as an adjunct to socio-historical interpretations of Japan; and second, the way in which certain anticanonical tendencies within that literature suggest the possibility of a nonhegemonical approach to contemporary Japan. To look across the panorama of Japanese literature extending over some 1,300 years is to be struck by, on the one hand, the coherent uniformity of a homogeneous tradition, building upon itself in an ostensibly harmonious way, and on the other, the conspicuous absence of any significant dissident corpus of writing. These perceptions owe substantially to the way in which Japanese literary history is written, of course, and they are reinforced by the observer's desire to fit complexities into a more manageable grid.

The history of Japanese literature since the late nineteenth century, a convenient because self-conscious watershed of the Japan story, is of a kind with its prefatory chapters except perhaps for a series of telltale seams in its otherwise hermetic fabric. In several instances, ranging from political novels of the early Meiji period to the Japanese romantics of the 1890s to the antiwar poets of the turn of the century to Christian and socialist idealists, feminists, and proletarian writers between the wars to the romantic nationalists of the 1930s and 1940s to the nihilists, decadents, and skeptics of the postwar period, the neat stitchwork with which these rough patches of textual production have been inserted into textbooks and literary histories gives rise to suspicion. Is it possible that these "marginal" texts evidence a shadow history of literary production behind the official tale of national literary heroes, groups, and movements? Is it possible that this other discourse, relegated to the fringes of

the mainstream, may give us, both Japanese and non-Japanese, a different account of the Japanese story?

As will be argued, it is possible to see the Dazai persona and text not as a confirmation of a Japanese version of romantic decadence, whose existence testifies to a different yet equal Japanese version of modernization, but rather as a dissonant voice seeking to interrupt the construction of that very harmonious narrative of successful modernization. Dazai's almost visceral resistance to closure of any kind, both in his own life and personal relations and in his fiction writing and essayistic discussions of history and literary criticism, indicates a profound hostility with regard to the so-called makers of history. This perversity emerges in Dazai's postwar adulation of the Emperor, with its protofascist overtones of empowerment for the disenfranchised. In Parts Two and Three of this book, we will see how, from Dazai's earliest to his last works, there is an increasingly deliberate and conscious effort to avoid closure, to open up narrative and history both beyond the individual writer's death and toward the dissonance already within the text and society itself.

PART ONE

# Nation and Suicidal Narrative

Every Japanese is in principle without exception
capable of committing, from pure snobbery,
a perfectly gratuitous suicide.
—Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction*
*to the Reading of Hegel*

## *Chapter One*

# FROM *SEPPUKU* TO *JISATSU*: SUICIDE AS NATIONAL ALLEGORY

### NATION AND ANTIHERO

All third-world texts are necessarily . . . to be read as . . . national allegories.
—Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature"

Nationalism itself is not some unitary thing with some predetermined essence and value.
—Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness"[1]

Japan's position in the world today is probably unique in that it is the only non-Western nation to be a major world economic power. In a sense, this contemporary "fact" may be seen as the culmination of Japan's modern quest for power against the all-powerful West. It is a story of both dramatic "success" and dramatic defeat. From the arrival of Commodore Perry's "black boats," which forced the Japanese to "open their doors" in 1854, followed by the imposition of the "unequal treaties" that were the stock in trade of Western imperialists, to the building in a mere three to four decades of an industrial military complex able to defeat the Empire of China in 1895 and the Empire of Russia in 1905, and no less in its faithful emulation of Western imperialism (colonizing Taiwan and Korea and ruling over them brutally for 35 years)—the Japanese state under an autocratic leadership showed itself to be undaunted in the face of Western military might, even up to the military challenge launched against the United States in World War II. Any evaluation of Japan's "successful" emulation of the West, moreover, must include the "economic miracle" of Japan's postwar rebirth, again audacious in its move from skyscraping growth rates and envy-inducing productivity and quality control to the recent waves of capital investment reaching into the American "heartland" itself.

There is also the matter of defeat in war. Not only the horrendous bombing, both nuclear and conventional, and the dislocation and ruin suffered by the Japanese people during the Pacific War, but also the failure of opposition groups within Japan to liberate the people from an authoritarian structure perpetuating the oppression of Japanese women,

men, children, and minorities (Korean, Chinese, Ainu, Burakumin). Moreover, in spite of the indications of success, there is a dramatic consciousness of a certain cultural and intellectual inadequacy, and it is felt by Japan's most articulate representatives: writers and intellectuals. Their dilemma, shared by many third world and minority intellectuals, has been that of having to create a distinctive cultural consciousness in terms that have already been defined by an external hegemonic power structure. Japanese writers and intellectuals have been painfully aware that the nation's economic prowess has not been accompanied by comparable cultural recognition. As the nation most likely to dominate the world economy in the twenty-first century, and currently in the process of buying up most of the Western as well as the third world, it seems strange that Japan could even be considered a third world country, and yet it does share with those nations a similar relation to Western hegemony. The Japanese case is on the surface different since Japan can boast a marked autonomy, and above all a history free of colonization, and yet the issue has anguished writers from the 1860s until today.

Japan came into the international arena in the middle of the nineteenth century as a nation lacking the advantages of the West and threatened by it. And although Japan's economic and political history is relatively familiar, what is less well known is that the Japanese literary tradition underwent a transformation as momentous and anxiety-producing as its industrial and social one. Japanese literature has had to grapple with the notions of identity and modernity in multiple ways. Culturally, it may be argued, the Japanese continue to see themselves as at best "honorary whites" not only in South Africa but on the Europe-dominated world culture scene.

It is this story of Japan in the last hundred years that is of concern here, specifically the way in which one version of that story underlies the way in which we read Japanese culture in general and Japanese literature in particular. In the present chapter, I argue that what has been familiar to specialists as modernization theory is at the same time a metanarrative encompassing and subsuming the perspectives of most residents of the advanced capitalist world. After briefly introducing some of the ways in which this metanarrative operates in the case of Japanese literature, I draw on the debate over "national allegory" in order to suggest how modern nationalism is constituted in large part by a notion of anonymous death, and how in the Japanese case, and most dramatically in literature, the metanarrative of modern nationalism is both constructed and undone by two opposed styles of self-destruction, traditional ritual suicide or seppuku and the more common "ordinary" suicide referred to literally as "killing of the self" or *jisatsu*.

### *The Modernization Syndrome*

Modernization is a part of a larger framework of conceptualization, involving economic, social, and cultural components, which for convenience may be designated historical development. It is in the evolution of two opposed concepts of human historical evolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Marxist historical materialism and modernization theory, that we must look in order to place the problematic of change in its proper perspective. Although these two competing sets of explanations are both outgrowths of Western intellectual history that continue to influence Japanese intellectual history,[2] it should be noted that Marxism has a history of more than a hundred years, whereas modernization theory—a more recent phenomenon—has had not only to define itself in the terms set by Marxism (without, however, seeking to confront those terms) but to counter the very venerability of the Marxist tradition by placing its own roots in a somehow equivalent time-honored tradition.[3]

The modernization syndrome involves the common propensity to see nations as horses in a horse race, all aiming for a finish line that remains mysteriously at one remove, but which may be thought of as the attainment of a perfectly modern and democratic society. On this race course are positioned the nations of the world, with the European and North American industrial nations stretching toward the finish line and the rest of the world set behind them at appropriate intervals. Implied in this metaphorical sketch is of course a notion of linear development and a teleological view of history in which the goal of a capitalist democracy is presumably shared by all. Modernizationists deny, however, that the goal is so well defined and claim their theory to be nothing more than a measuring instrument for determining the relative position of each nation. Although modernization theory has been much discredited in certain economic and sociological quarters, as much for its politically motivated construction (i.e., antisocialist) as for its tendentious scientific claims, one may argue that the implicit tendency to view the world as a horse race has not changed, especially where people must continue to define themselves in relation to or against a cultural imperialist reality.

The field of Japanese literature, as the study of other aspects of culture, has generally not been included under the rubric of the "social sciences" or of history and, as a result, has perhaps been overlooked in critiques of the dominant tendencies in those areas. Yet, the role of culture and values has been central indeed. The fact that literature has seemed so insignificant in this evolution, except as a "reflector," is not only a result of the traditional tendency to view the humanities from a respectful (and often condescending) distance, but may also be due to the failure of the modernizationist nemesis, Marxism, to come to terms with its real signif-

icance. In other words, if modernization theory was the "counter-ideology" to Marxism that it gave every indication of being, its choice of "targets" was determined by those areas in which Marxist scholarship in Japan had been most effective, and hence perceived as the most threatening: economic, political, social, and institutional development. Culture (with the important exception of education, perhaps) and literature have been relatively neglected, and yet the field of literary studies seems to be as infused with modernizationist assumptions as its social science counterparts.

## *Modernizing Japanese Literature*

> Purely Japanese literature died out completely around the year 1897. The literature written after that is not Japanese literature. It is Western literature written in the Japanese language for the sake of form only.
> —Nagai Kafū, quoted in Seidensticker's *Kafū the Scribbler*

> The transformation of Japan within the space of about forty years from an obscure Oriental monarchy to one of the great powers is accounted a miracle of the modern age. . . . In 1868 . . . Japanese literature had dropped to one of its lowest levels. . . . And yet within the same forty years . . . Japanese literature moved from idle quips . . . to Symbolist poetry, from . . . harlots to the complexities of the psychological novel.
> —Donald Keene, *Modern Japanese Literature*

Discussions of modern Japanese literature invariably imply a historical process of development, whether it be one characterized by a movement of literary forms themselves or a perception of those forms as reflecting a more widespread process in the society at large. In general, there is an implicit bias running throughout both Western and Japanese writings, to the effect that Japanese culture, in line with socio-political trends in Japanese society, is wending its (sometimes tortuous) way toward a model that the author presumably shares with the reader. Some of the attributes of the model are suggested by the terms "Symbolist poetry" and "complexities of the psychological novel" quoted above. They are offered not merely as indications of what Japanese writers were seeking (and, it is implied, failing) to emulate, but as the normal and proper course for a literature seeking to be "modern." This is epitomized by the wistful assertion that, unlike the development of the modern political and industrial state, "in literature the change came more slowly."[4]

One of the arguments of this book is that such developmental perspectives underlie the entire thrust of Western (and dominant Japanese) perceptions and images of Japan, be they economic, political, social, or cultural. Moreover, this phenomenon is not merely an oversight or a fortuitous Eurocentric bias that can be eliminated by increased sensitivity to the specificity of Japanese culture; it is rather a structural component of an ideological apparatus that informs our perceived relation to society and to the world.

The literary history of the Meiji period reveals an increasing factionalization (proliferation of schools and tendencies) coupled with a trend toward a heightened self-awareness among intellectuals and writers of their own role and status (evident in the development of a modern literary criticism, in the growth of the introspective tendency, and in the increasing social orientation of writers). The period of early Meiji is characterized as that of the "Japanese enlightenment," the key components of which are the adoption by the Meiji state and its ideologues (the most notable of whom was Fukuzawa Yukichi) of a utilitarian approach to society. The notion that technical change was to be tempered by the maintenance of a Confucian value system was soon shown to be untenable, as industrialization disrupted institutional fixtures at all levels of society.

There is a consensus that the writing of Edo literature, the *gesaku* tradition, had been at a "low ebb" on the eve of modernization, capable at best of producing satirical tirades directed at adherents of the new ways. The early years from 1868 to 1877 are placed in their proper perspective by the advent, in bold relief, of the novel form in the succeeding decade. The "novel" is introduced in the form of translations of Western works and Japanese versions of political and romantic novels. The enthusiastic search for models to which to relate Japanese reality, as exemplified in the political novel (*seiji shōsetsu*), are, like the Peoples Rights movement, generally accorded short shrift by critics, much as is the proletarian literature of the 1920s and 1930s. The criteria developed to judge them are derived from a different set of concerns than those underlying their creation.

The watershed is conveniently marked by Tsubouchi Shōyō's advocacy in his *Essence of the Novel* (*Shōsetsu shinzui*, 1885) of a more realistic novel in the British Victorian mode, whereas the evolution of Meiji, and indeed of Japanese literature subsequent to that, is defined in terms of whether the goal of a "modern novel" was achieved or not. Thus, the advent of the Naturalist movement, with its precursor Futabatei Shimei and his *Drifting Clouds* (*Ukigumo*, 1886) incorporates the prototype and gauge against which subsequent efforts are judged or directed.[5] On the one hand, there is the Romantic/Realist reaction of the 1890s, spearheaded by Ozaki Kōyō and Kōda Rohan, and their creation, the Kenyū-

sha group, marking the beginning of the Japanese literary establishment (*bundan*); on the other, the line of ideological, social, and naturalistic *Ich-roman* fiction culminating in the "breakthroughs" of Shimazaki Tōson with *The Broken Commandment* (*Hakai*, 1906) and Tayama Katai with *The Quilt* (*Futon*, 1907). "Progress" is thus registered in successive waves of innovation inspired by or in reaction to Western trends and crystallized by the labels of realism, neoclassicism, romanticism, naturalism, and antinaturalism. The Meiji period is brought symbolically to a close politically with the death of the Meiji Emperor in 1912, accompanied by the startling *junshi* (following one's lord in death) by seppuku of General Nogi and his wife (and no less so at another level by the controversial conviction of Kōtoku Shūsui and others for "conspiring to assassinate the Emperor"—this in 1910, the year of Japan's annexation of Korea); and, in literature, again in 1912, with Mori Ōgai's "abandonment of [his] uncomfortable soul-searching"[6] and Natsume Sōseki's productive output of psychological novels until his death in 1915.

A key assumption underlying studies of Japanese literature in the Meiji period was that Japan was successfully assimilating not only Western knowledge and technology, but Western culture and values as well. Nowhere was the measure of success better revealed, it would seem, than in Japanese writers' ability to produce the "psychological novel." The accolades for this achievement bestowed by critics on Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–1925) authors, though primarily on Sōseki, have led to their being assimilated into the modernization syndrome in a resounding manner: "He felt that his personal difficulties were those of all modern Japanese and, indeed, those of all men in the modern world. Consequently, although the psychological patterns that Sōseki depicted were unmistakably Japanese, they were at the same time universal."[7]

Sōseki's "psychological novel" is significantly related not only to the West, but to a distinctively "Japanese" perspective. Howard Hibbett argues that Japan's modern psychological tradition has deeper roots than one might suspect: "The Japanese tradition boasts the first great psychological novel [*The Tale of Genji*] of the world." He argues, moreover, that a Japanese psychological analysis is, in Kawabata's terms, more contemplative than analytical, dealing in the long run with a conflict that is usually between the "individual and the family" rather than "within the self."[8] The "crucial theme" of the modern Japanese psychological novel, then, is "its uneasy, self-critical individualism," introduced and developed by Sōseki himself in his famous 1914 speech to students on "My Individualism." Sōseki's development is also depicted as an Eriksonian "identity crisis," leading us to an explanation of his creativity while lending an aura of psychohistory to Japan's modernization success story.[9]

In sum, modern Japanese literature is seen as an interplay between

external Western influence and a reactive "native" consciousness, which in at least the better instances culminates in a turn back to the tradition. This perception becomes the self-conscious theme of key works, ranging from Futabatei's *Drifting Clouds* to Tanizaki Junichirō's *Some Prefer Nettles* (*Tade kuu mushi*, 1929), in which the "psychological" protagonist, Kaname, moves kaleidoscopically among a bevy of allegorical females, turning from his modern, Western wife Misako toward the "traditionalist" tendency represented by his father-in-law's mistress Ohisa, and on the way jarred sensually but superficially by the threatening "hybrid," the Eurasian prostitute Louise. This novel at the same time serves as an allegory for the Japanese intellectual in the modern era, whose process of adaptation can be and has been reduced to a paradigm.

> A pattern may be traced in the careers of many figures of modern Japanese fiction. First, a novelist experiences a period of strong influence from a European literature (Russian for Futabatei Shimei, German for Mori Ōgai, English for Natsume Sōseki, French for Nagai Kafū, etc.); next comes a period when he incorporates European techniques in his writings; and finally, he rejects obvious Western influence in favor of traditional Japanese material.[10]

The nexus between writer and nation will be explored subsequently in terms of the concept of "national allegory." But already we may note how the modernizationist vision of a process at work here seeks to universalize not so much an experience actually undergone by the West as an ideal of what that experience should be. Hence, the sense of insufficiency, and the "turn back" to a national essence. Yet this perception must be considered together with a series of other paradigms integral to Japanese literature, and all charged with modernizationist valences allowing them to interact in a specifically Japanese national narrative: these include the "individualism" problematic, the alienation syndrome, the suicidal writer phenomenon, and the *tenkō* (political apostate) dilemma of the 1930s.

The "individualism" paradigm is developed in the form of a "quest for autonomy" on the part of the Japanese nation, paralleled by a similar quest at the cultural and individual level.[11] Sōseki is seen as the distinguished spokesperson here, expounding against the superficiality of Japan's Westernization (an "externally induced enlightenment") and decrying Japan's cutting itself off from tradition and from its "ancestral energies." Yet, interestingly enough, Sōseki's search for "internal" modernization is depicted as a desire for "true" or "deep" individualism—not of the "superficial" variety, but of the kind he saw in the American poet Whitman, whom he regarded as representative of "the spirit of a republican people."[12] Sōseki is said to have intensely disliked the Japanese ultrapatriots of his day and to have been critical of Japan's military and political actions. Yet, his own achievement and life are presented as signs

of the "progress" of the same nation-state that had annexed Korea and was menacing China and the rest of Asia. The imperialist nature of Japanese development was rationalized by its proponents in Japan as part of their respectable goal of "catching up with the West," while Japan's military "successes" were also begrudgingly recognized in the West, constituting acknowledgment, as it were, that Japan must be doing something right.

In literature, the critic is often faced with a dilemma. Studies that posit a Western model for emulation inevitably judge the Japanese experiment to be a failure. At the same time, critical efforts to establish the integrity of the non-Western writer all too often end up being either denigration by too facile cross-cultural comparisons or mystification by essentialization. The latter occurs, for instance, when Westerners are accused of "refus[ing] to read the Japanese novel in terms of the Japanese traditions."[13] Similarly, the well-intentioned argument "that the great works of Japanese literature succeed brilliantly on their own terms" undoes itself when readers are told that "it is up to us to find out what those terms are."[14] The goal of recognizing the autonomy of Japanese literature without essentializing it is achieved in one instance, however, by William Sibley, who seeks to unmask the disguised ideological practice endemic to cross-cultural criticism. In his account of Japanese naturalism, he affirms the "autonomy" of the Meiji-Taisho "giants" (Tōson, Katai, Sōseki, Ōgai, Akutagawa), whose works, "neither imitations of Western literature nor throwbacks to an eclipsed Japanese tradition, . . . stand on their own."[15] More succinctly than any other critic of Japanese literature in the West, Sibley articulates the trend that may be said to underlie almost all Western writing on Japan when he assesses the highly didactic treatment of Taisho writers and intellectuals by Tatsuo Arima in his *Failure of Freedom*: "And once again modern Japanese culture and history are examined with an eye to finding parallels which they display, or fail to display, with a preconceived pattern of mankind's historical destiny: a pattern that is clearly based on the progressive development of the Western liberal democracies."[16]

Sibley in his own reading of Japanese literature affirms not the successes or failures of writers, but their complex humanity as intellectuals and nonconformists, aware and in struggle with their changing reality.

> The most gifted of them from Futabatei Shimei to Ōe Kenzaburō have been *intelligences rebelles*. . . . They have for the most part neither worked for nor helped to perfect the machine. They have rejected, or simply ignored, the new and dehumanizing "definition of man." And they have not only contrived more successfully than most to escape the machine's domination over

the individual human spirit, but through their writings they have offered others encouragement to do likewise, if only temporarily and vicariously.[17]

The situation of the modern Japanese author writing toward and against an elusive ideal of Western fiction is in certain ways similar to that of nineteenth-century English women writers, whose fiction, according to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their *Madwoman in the Attic*, concealed a hidden plot, "the woman writer's quest for her own story," a narrative seeking to be liberated from its preordained patriarchal script.[18] Although the concealed story of Japanese woman writers has yet to be told, it may be expected to incorporate a quest for autonomy from a constricting notion of modernization. In this instance, the marginality and role of writers like Dazai may be instructive. The telling of one's own story can involve a radical reversal of perspectives whereby a history or literature is newly perceived no longer from the vantage point of the powerful but from the point of view of the oppressed, the voiceless.

## *Modernism and Modernization*

The story of Japanese modernism is one marked by many of the same features characterizing the process of modernization in Japan. This story introduces several key players in allegorical costume: featured are traditional Japan, the new Japan, the West (often an absent player), and Westernized Japan. An early novel such as Futabatei's *Drifting Clouds*, enshrined as "Japan's first modern novel" in spite of a written style still struggling to emerge from its feudal bonds,[19]—introduces a set of such players, each with suggestively allegorical appellations, as new modern literary characters: the flashy, sycophantic, up-and-coming Noboru; the perky, flighty young woman Osei; her watchful, calculating mother Omasa; and the "antihero," the withdrawn, oppressively shy, tradition-bound Bunzō.

The thirty years between Futabatei's novel and Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* (The Heart, 1915), which has remained a kind of high-water mark in the modern history of Japanese literature, saw Japan go from its own up-and-coming role as a newly emerging third world nation to that of ranking world imperialist in the eastern hemisphere of the globe. From light to heavy industry, from peaceful internal development to militarist external aggression, Japan, after successful wars against China and Russia in 1895 and 1905, went on to occupy Taiwan and Korea by 1910 and to threaten China. The end of the Meiji period (1868–1912), notwithstanding the inference of its name as "enlightened rule," thus posed a dilemma for sensitive intellectuals and writers like Sōseki, whose initial optimistic sense of the modern world had now dampened. The paradigmatic shift in

mood carried over as it were even in metaphors, from those of volume to the visual, and as the economic structure went from an emphasis on light to heavy industry, the bright neon lights and streetlamps of the urban metropolis seemed more and more to belie a dark, inner psychological turmoil. This was most apparent in the works of writers and intellectuals whose initial warm welcome of the enlightening canons of Western knowledge was giving way to deep anxiety as they grappled with the violent turns taken by the national locomotive.

Sōseki's perception of a national quest gone awry is developed at length in his remarkable psychological novels and in his public statements on the nature of individualism in Japan. His concern with the intellectual, with the elite of Japan, becomes the focal point of all thinkers grappling with the so-called process of modernization. It cuts across social and literary movements from right to left, and it presages the postwar debates on the role of the individual as an indicator of successful or unsuccessful modernization, from political scientist Maruyama Masao on individualism to the intellectual preoccupation with *shutaisei* (the quality of individual autonomy or self-directedness), which continues to structure debates about Japan as an international power.[20] This concern with the individual, in its various interdisciplinary manifestations, is a vital part of the discourse of modernization. It shares with other aspects of the modernization story the concerns that inform the particular nature of modernism as a cultural movement within Japan, including a strong sense of alienation at the national intellectual level.

Japanese modernism thus reflects the way that Japanese intellectuals, especially those at the avant-garde, are both empowered and undermined by a form of cultural schizophrenia. The attempt to write, to express, to create an autonomous and distinctive Japanese narrative seems to self-destruct because the discursive mode itself appears increasingly to be a subversion of the story by the stranger within oneself. The preoccupation with alienation and madness is thus at one level a reflection of the individual's perception of reality in twentieth-century industrial capitalist society. But it is also—and it is this point that may be said to distinguish the Japanese case, and perhaps other third world instances, from their European models, from Baudelaire to Proust and Joyce—a sense that the very terms for dealing with one's perceptions are also alien. It is the constant, gnawing suggestion that the very language and form of one's own writing, albeit in one's own native Japanese, is somehow not simply, as might be the case for the Western writer, opaque, impermeable, and "other" to one's own psyche, but that it is also "other" in the sense of being foreign and threatening.

It is thus perhaps no accident that Western critics have highlighted, so

to pun, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the "single, canonical text" of modernism, "as exemplary and enduring a modern classic as we have."[21] For that short volume, more than any other, with all its colonialist ambiguities and racist overtones, posits a modernity whose veneer of civilized ethics is so thin that we can almost see the volcanic lava bed of passion and violence bubbling beneath the surface. Perhaps this is why surface becomes so quintessentially the focus and object of modern art. Surface is all there is. The metaphors that proliferate in modernism, from *Heart of Darkness* on, play around this opposition of center and surface. What is common to Conrad and to the presumably distinctive Japanese esthetic is the notion of a center that is empty. The hidden "inner truth" with which Marlowe tantalizes his listeners is described as an "evil of vacancy."[22] Japanese modernists could well look to the emperor system, as did some of their number after the war, and find that the "empty center" marked by the Imperial Palace in Tokyo was symbolic of the absent ethical structure informing Japan's behavior in Asia.[23] The demystification of the emperor, like the demystification of Conrad's Kurtz, however, via their respective humanizing narratives, only reinforces the impression of a "vacancy," an empty center around which civilization whirls. It is no coincidence that Sōseki is thought of in this connection, or that Sōseki's own concerns were parallel to those of Conrad's in *Heart of Darkness*. Sōseki, in England at the time of Conrad's publication of that novel (1902), may have been creating his own version of it in his *Kokoro*, that novel about human evil set not in an exotic jungle, but in the sterility of urban middle-class Meiji Japan.

## *National Allegory and Death*

Nationalism is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual.
—Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. . . . Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings.
—Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.
—Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature"

Aijaz Ahmad, in his response to Fredric Jameson's assertion that "all third world texts are necessarily . . . to be read as national allegories," warns against the danger of attributing to nationalism a unitary and essential value.[24] And yet, both Ahmad's and Jameson's texts appear as national allegories in their own right, with the authors themselves as products of first world and third world intellectual life. Perhaps Jameson has gone too far in labeling all third world texts "national allegories," or perhaps he has not gone far enough. Is it not rather the metatextual reference of readership that is involved here? All third world texts are national allegories when read by first world readers.

The problem of third world self-representation is never more dramatic than when it is consciously pitted against its imperialist Other. And yet, the very notion of literature as resistance, so powerfully presented in Barbara Harlow's work,[25] must involve a reading as well as a writing, a sharing of experience, consciousness, and purpose if it is to achieve its full potential. Literature may just as often not realize this concomitance of circumstances, yet it does play a role and even in its most desultory state keeps hope alive.

The project common to all non-European literatures in the twentieth century of establishing an autonomous identity is already compromised by the fact of having to do so against the existence of a canon that is not only unchallenged but which is seen as the very genetic source of one's own resistance. As with the conundrum of economic, social, political modernization, so with literary culture, wherein ideas of freedom, equality, and individual rights are seen to derive from that tradition which is simultaneously the source of the imperialism, colonialism, and racism that has led to the present state of inequality.

It is in this respect, among possible others, that the Japanese context may provide a case in point for critics of third world literature. Although Japan differs from many third world situations in having a prodigious literary tradition, still the trauma of individual and cultural identity is a vital part of modern Japanese history. And the twin concomitants of Westernization—its seductiveness and its stigma—are invariably part of that history, coming into play at those junctures of the literary imaginative process when resistance to the West was a vital part of the intellectual's role.

The narrative of modern nationalism requires its allegorical heros. But nationalism is itself, as Benedict Anderson demonstrates, a very strange narrative, one involving new apprehensions of time and space.[26] Two forms of print, the newspaper and the novel, become the modes that allow for the development of that imagined community of nationhood because they allow for a simultaneity that Anderson describes, borrowing Walter Benjamin's term, as "homogeneous, empty time" and which is

marked by "temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (30). Within this new apprehension of the world is a notion of fraternal community such that "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship," whose emotional power has made it possible "for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (16).

In Japan the narratives of seppuku, of willingness to die, were from ancient and medieval times associated with loyalty to a lord, master, or house. With the advent of modernity, seppuku took on the aura of a nationalistic narrative, one whose elaboration extends from one of Japan's first literary modernizationists, Mori Ōgai, and through to Mishima Yukio, whose own death in this manner is the most dramatic instance of an attempt to make suicide a part of Japan's distinctive national allegory.

Mori Ōgai's short story titled "The Incident at Sakai" (1914) is the product of a period in which Japan had struggled to compete with the West and had to a significant degree, by virtue of its industrial and military successes, achieved a certain parity with the imperialist powers. The death in 1912 of the Meiji Emperor, revered as the guiding spirit of Japanese modernization, marked a critical juncture of the nation's life. But what struck Ōgai's imagination even more than the symbolic end of an era was the death by seppuku of General Nogi Maresuke and his wife, both of whom took their lives in a traditional act of loyalty to the Emperor known as *junshi*.[27] It was, moreover, this event that catalyzed a turn in Ōgai's own literary production. He shifted from his twenty years of writing fiction in modes inspired by Western naturalism and German romanticism and began a series of works of historical fiction. "The Incident at Sakai" is based on a historical event that took place in 1868, the year of the Imperial Restoration, while tensions still lingered in Japan, both internally between forces who had fought the civil war, and externally, between Japanese and the varied groups of European military, diplomatic, and commercial entities poised to enter Japan.

The historical incident at Sakai involved a French naval boat, whose sailors illegally entered the port town of Sakai, near Osaka, and acted irreverently in Shinto and Buddhist places of worship, entered private homes, molested young women, and tried to run off with a military flag. Japanese soldiers responded by giving chase. A series of mishaps, including the killing of one of the French soldiers with an axe, led to an exchange of fire and the eventual deaths of sixteen French soldiers. The French ambassador, Leon Roche, demanded the execution of twenty of the Japanese soldiers as part of a set of reparations.

The account by Ōgai is noteworthy for its dry and reportorial manner. Unlike his romantic fiction, the inner thoughts of the characters are not

described, although they are revealed through occasional dialogue provided in a quasi-journalistic style. The dramatic effect is heightened, however, by this low key as the account turns on the soldiers' response to their fate. For those chosen by lot to die, "dying was not the issue. They had been resigned to dying since the day they [became] soldiers. But they must not die in disgrace. Therefore they resolved to request permission to commit seppuku."[28]

As the text tells us, these men were not samurai and therefore should not have had the privilege of dying in this manner. Pressure on the higher levels leads to the decision to grant them samurai status and allow them to die by seppuku. It should be noted parenthetically that not a few of the famous instances of seppuku of the last 300 years were essentially anachronistic. They were either against the law or at least against the prevailing ethic of the times, but in each instance they evoked some sense of a need for a spirituality thought to be lacking in the contemporaneous era. In this instance, the development of Ōgai's text makes clear that this resurrected spirituality is designed to assert Japanese superiority over the West. As requested, the executions are carried out in the presence of the French consul accompanied by twenty French soldiers. The first Japanese to die, Shinoura Inokichi, walks to the place of seppuku, bows to the officials, takes a short sword and "cries out in a voice like thunder": "Frenchmen! I am not dying for your sake. I am dying for my Imperial nation. Observe the seppuku of a Japanese soldier" (116). The text describes in precise and graphic detail the process of Shinoura's cutting open his stomach and pulling out his intestines while "glaring at the French consul." When his second fails to decapitate him on the first try, Shinoura cries out that he is still alive, and to cut again. Twelve more die in this manner, at which point we are told that "the French consul had been continually standing up and sitting down again, and seemed to be almost beside himself" (117). Suddenly, the whole French contingent got up and left the site with no apology or explanation, and as soon as they were outside the temple gate, they "broke into a run for the harbor."

We have here an example of a self-conscious national allegory involving a reversal of the power situation. Although reflecting an effort to depict a spiritual resistance couched in nationalistic terms, Ōgai's story also reflects the power of literary representation to assert a spiritual superiority even in the face of military weakness. Especially telling is the way in which the narrative strikes at the fears and insecurities of the Western reader, although it is written in order to give pride to the Japanese reader.

The story of modern writing in Japan is associated more of course with that familiar syndrome of alienation, which yields its own forms of suicide, labeled "egoistic" and "anomic" by Durkheim.[29] Ultimately it is this

type of suicide, referred to neutrally as *jisatsu* (self-destruction, murder of the self) and associated intimately with several Japanese writers, that is seen as an indicator of modernization by testifying to the presence of disaffected, alienated artists. The social alienation of such writers contrasts with the efforts of an Ōgai or a Mishima to integrate death with romantic nationalism. But this polarity appears only later in the wake of such other epoch-marking suicides as those of Akutagawa and Dazai.

Perhaps one novel may be said to stand out in relief in the development of modern Japanese literature, Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro*. Let us consider it, however, not as a landmark psychological novel, but as a significant link in the national allegory metanarrative. That link is once again associated with death and suicide, indeed with two suicides marking in effect a transition from a traditional to a "modern" form of suicide, and represented in the complex structural play within the novel between General Nogi's seppuku and Sensei's *jisatsu*. Nogi's *junshi* here on the occasion of the Emperor Meiji's death serves as inspiration for one of Japan's most famous modern literary suicides, the intriguing and impenetrable Sensei.

In brief, the three generations represented by General Nogi, Sensei, and the student narrator "I" are linked by suicide, but the clarity of purpose associated with the earlier period is replaced here by an obscurity of purpose and of identity. Thus, Sensei contrasts the "evil" in his own heart, which led him to push his friend K. to his suicide, with the loyalty of Nogi to his emperor but also to his nation. When Sensei informs his young companion that "you will not understand clearly why I am about to die," he says it is because "you and I belong to different eras, and so we think differently,"[30] suggesting an alienation in both time and space. Ironically, Sensei's all too modern alienation and suicide represent the fragmentation that lies at the "heart" of the modern nation. How is it that homogeneous empty time can make people who do not know one another ready to die for each other? This notion, which may not be unrelated to Christian sacrifice, takes on religious overtones in the language with which Sensei communicates his impending suicide to his friend: "Now I myself am about to cut open my own heart, and drench your face with my blood. And I shall be satisfied if, when my heart stops beating, a new life lodges itself within your breast."[31]

The violence of the imagery as well as the notion of mystical transference here may suggest how the "premodern" will continue to underlie the surface clarity of modernism. This metaphorical play, best seen in Conrad and Sōseki, persists through to the postwar versions of modernization. But it is also apparent in that other transitional suicide, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, whose death in 1927 constitutes its own tension for readers of his work and helps to make him and his oeuvre into a kind of

modernist watershed. Akutagawa is perhaps best known outside Japan largely through the Kurosawa Akira film, "Rashōmon" (1950), an adaptation of two of his short stories that calls into question the role of narrative and truth. In Japan he is admired for his literary technique, his provocative reworkings of traditional and foreign tales, as well as for that confluence of art, life, and death that has tended to identify him as a period-ending marker in modern Japanese culture, and for which his writings appear to provide evidence of his own complicity. It is his death by clearly premeditated suicide in 1927 that lends credence to the notion of a prescient role in creating that sense of an ending of the Taishō period (1912–1926). "His suicide was no less significant than that of General Nogi, whom he disliked, for it heralded the end of the Taishō period just as Nogi's suicide did that of the Meiji period (1868–1912)."[32]

Akutagawa's suicide evoked a strong sense of the end of an era among critics of very different persuasions. None were as powerful, however, as Miyamoto Kenji, who explained the universalist nature of Akutagawa's artistic desperation in Marxist terms. Miyamoto carefully identified the class roots of Akutagawa's pessimism, although it was his analysis of the bourgeois subject and its totalizing tendency that allowed him to explain the impact of Akutagawa in Japan. To Miyamoto, the petty bourgeoisie's self-despair had to be "the despair of society as a whole. . . . Akutagawa view[ed] the agony born of and defined by his physiology and his social class as the eternal agony of humanity."[33]

## A Tale of Two Suicides

The text of twentieth-century Japanese history is thus highlighted by a number of suicides, each of which has been made to crystallize a particular node of signification for Japan's modernizationist enterprise. From General Nogi Maresuke and his wife Shizuko to three of Japan's most celebrated modern authors—Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (by drugs, 1927), Dazai Osamu (by drowning, 1948), and Mishima Yukio (by seppuku, 1970)—each of these deaths has generated a corpus of texts whose effect, if not intent, has been to establish or reinforce a conjuncture between the death in question and the flight pattern of modern Japanese history.

Two parenthetical elements are noteworthy here: one is that three out of the above four male suicides involved writers, and the fourth, General Nogi, though not a writer himself, owes much of the enduring perception of his death, as we have seen, to its textualization in Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro*. It is hardly insignificant, moreover, that the perception of a gap between Nogi's samurai death and the demise of Sōseki's fictional surrogate Sensei is generally understood as a reference to the cultural and psychological trajectory of Japanese modernization in the Meiji period,

with its attendant sense of loss and alienation.[34] Second, it may be noted that these four suicides are all seen to straddle junctures of time that were and/or are felt to be transitional for the Japanese nation. This observation is as true for the anomic suicides of Akutagawa at the end of the Taishō period and Dazai in the wake of World War II as it is for Nogi's and Mishima's more self-conscious, historically marked deaths.

Let us here juxtapose the two postwar suicides of Dazai and Mishima in order to elicit a problematics of reading postwar Japanese literature and history. Beyond the relational similarity that has suggested this analysis (i.e., that both men were writers, that police dossiers designated them as suicides, and that the reports of their deaths elicited intense emotional reaction throughout Japan), there are also suggestive differences between these two events. First, in terms of public response, although with dissenting minorities on each side, it is possible to discern a predominantly tearful empathy for Dazai in 1948 as against an outraged antipathy for Mishima in 1970. The polarization here is all the more striking when it is seen as a reversal of an idealized system of feudal values, whereby a "proper" samurai death would put to shame a trivial sordid affair involving a lower-class woman. Yet, there can be no question that Dazai's anguished self-destructive decadence sparked a warm current of sympathy and a sense of loss, whereas Mishima's "theatrical suicide" elicited an indignant outcry of consternation, emblematized by then Prime Minister of Defense Nakasone's labeling of him as an "enemy of democracy and order" and Prime Minister Satō's remark that Mishima had to be "mad."[35]

Second, there is the stark contrast in the approaches to and methods of suicide: Dazai's death by drowning while drunk coming as an almost anticlimactic denouement to a series of failed suicide attempts, whereas Mishima's, from all accounts, was planned years in advance to the day and hour with a precision as razor-sharp as the dagger used to perform the seppuku. But above all, what may be said to define the locus of difference here is the nature of the respective life-narratives generating and generated by these two suicides. Mishima's textualization of death in his writing, no less than the honing of his body through disciplined exercise, is, as it were, authenticated by the obsessive punctuality of his life and death, a punctuality testified to by his manuscripts and letters, as by the already famous anecdote to the effect that he delivered the last installment of his final tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility,* to his publisher on the very day of his death.[36] The apparent clarity of intent in Mishima renders all the more ambiguous the murky circumstances surrounding Dazai's death, whose very status as suicide, as we have seen, was itself subject to doubt. Pair the loose ends of this narrative of suicide with Dazai's un-

finished manuscripts and fragmentary style and we can begin to consider the implications of this polarity for reading the postwar period.

The role of suicide as a rhetorical device within the modernization narrative, or in social science terms as an indicator of a modern subjectivity, is inevitably ambiguous. Because it posits a notion of disillusionment, of the failure of a modern consciousness, it suggests the possibility of an end to progress itself and conjures up the presence of an "antimodern" impulse that threatens the desired state of modernity. Seen in this way, suicide also reveals the way in which the metanarrative of modernization hides or represses another story of difference, that of a primitive, feudal Japan. Whereas a Dazai represents a "fragmented, schizoid" subjectivity, and his suicide a prototypically modern alienated variety, Mishima's seppuku stands for an effort to revive a "coherent" premodern notion of the individual subject, one connected with the romantic notion of a "nobility of failure" extending back to Japan's protohistoric age. As a metaphor, then, Mishima's seppuku projects a desire for control, whereas Dazai's *jisatsu* infers an inability to master the modern situation.

### *Suicidally Progressive*

Let us consider Dazai's suicide as a negative indicator of progress and see how Dazai the writer appears to be the most representative of cases for two American scholars. One comparative study by Robert George Sewell of suicide in Asia and Europe emerges with a typology according to which suicide, reflecting increasingly high levels of individuation, appears to take on an aura and propulsion of its own.

> Suicide reflects a significant progression in perceptions of self and society. Classic honor suicide reveals a relatively primitive level of individuation and a high degree of social integration. Love suicide, especially in the form of double suicide, is midway in the progression, since two lovers are torn between societal demands and love for each other. . . . Artist-intellectual suicide is egoistic suicide in Durkheim's lexicon, since motivations are . . . related to an individual's effort and desire to create . . . and often parallel [those] of the contemporary alienated hero or antihero.[37]

The paradigm of progress familiar in modernization theory is in Sewell's study replicated in a model of suicide as representative of incremental freedom, "a progression in the perceptions of self and society, from little self-identity to stronger individuation" (198). The modernization paradigm, as has been noted, is characterized by two claims—objectivity and universalism—both of which are repressed in the argument here for a "motivational matrix of universal categories of suicide in literature." Through such a matrix both "Eastern and Western authors" are

enabled "to render acts of suicide, which were expressions of commitment to transcendent human values, in a compassionate and noble light" (198). In this account, the specific differences between East and West, as well as within each tradition, are collapsed beneath the weight of twentieth-century humanism, whose exemplary representative is the artist-intellectual, a Sylvia Plath in the West, a Dazai Osamu in Japan. Of particular significance here is the corollary whereby the modern Western reader is expected to find that "the artist-intellectual suicide is the least resistant to cross-cultural understanding" (157).

Thus, it should be noted, the glorification of intellectual and artistic suicides is ironically part and parcel of that same process of modernization that masks the oppression and suffering and the far less glorious suicides (registered and not) of nameless men, women, and children. The irony here lies in the manner whereby the more marginal the status of the artist as abnormal individual, the more banal is the existing structure of normality, wherein ordinary suicides silently accumulate. The paradigm of modern suicide thus operates in Japan not only to reinforce the dominant perception of reality, as it does in Europe, but also, via the alienated writer, to provide Japan with an additional socio-cultural indicator of its own "successful" modernization process.

For George De Vos, author of one of the major American works on Japanese society,[38] Japanese literature and writers also provide evidence of a modernizing progression in attitudes toward suicide, first from a premodern to a modern perspective, and then within the modern context to a more intensely subjective self-consciousness. De Vos begins with a critique of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), author of numerous love suicide plays at the turn of the eighteenth century: "[Chikamatsu] never examines whether individuals resolved to suicide, if given sudden release from societal pressure, would in fact have found within themselves the real capacity for sustained relationship" (548).

Given the hypothetical nature of this conjecture, doubly so in fact since we are dealing with fictional characters in a deliberately contrived dramatic situation, one is hard put to know why De Vos introduces Chikamatsu, unless it is to enhance the subsequent modern subjectivity with which his twentieth-century writers are to contemplate their deaths. It should be pointed out, moreover, that De Vos here is dealing with plays written for stylized theater, Kabuki and Bunraku, and that although these suicide plays were often based on actual incidents, they were hardly written with a view to exploring the kinds of questions De Vos poses.

There is a related issue here with De Vos's subsequent discussion of Sōseki, Akutagawa, and Dazai: to what extent can one use contemporary autobiographical fiction as data for this kind of analysis? Although critics of Japanese literature have not worried much about the distinction, it is

ironic that, as the textuality of social science and history is coming under increasing scrutiny, not only De Vos but Japanese scholars of suicide use fiction unabashedly as their "data."[39] De Vos's progression of modern authors begins with Sōseki, whose heroes pursue and attain their goals, but only at the cost of "becoming the victims of their own consciences." In delineating Sōseki's "inner-directed attitude," De Vos makes explicit the Western model he is using to measure alienation as a function of Japanese modernization: "Throughout our analysis, we have found Riesman's formulation concerning the nature of alienation in American society a provocative theoretical framework within which to view Japanese modernization. His trichotomy of "tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed" orientations are applicable to Japan" (547).

Akutagawa for De Vos is in a "truly isolated, attenuated position," but it is Dazai who emerges as the most self-conscious sufferer of alienation. Where Sōseki is said to fail at "esthetic withdrawal," and Akutagawa to remain a detached, noncommitted satirical observer of society, it is Dazai's portrayal from the view of "the protagonist himself," Oba Yōzō of *No Longer Human*, that inspires De Vos's depiction of him as the truly modern alienated writer: "Dazai [of the three authors] shows the most obvious personal disorganization (524). . . . [Dazai] presents the observer himself as a participant in or a protagonist of the hypocrisy practiced between humans" (549). In sum, it is his attitude toward suicide itself that makes Dazai the ultimate modern, the "rebel without a cause":

> Dazai Osamu mocks the meaning of the suicidal act. For him it takes the form of a histrionic *kōan* of sincerity, which he himself cannot solve. He is uncertain as to his own sincerity concerning suicide as he is uncertain and doubtful of the sincerity of any form of human communication. There are no standards left for Dazai . . . [who] as a modern rebel loses orientation completely without the authoritarian society that once gave opposition purpose. The only positive form of external aggression he had found in his life was in the capacity to express anger toward authoritarian injustice. (524)

## *Suicidally Regressive*

Let us now consider Dazai's "antipode," Mishima Yukio, as exemplar of that antimodern mode with which his suicide has associated him in Japan's postwar text.

> Mishima's act was, like many of his novels, if not better understood, at least more accepted outside of Japan, much as is often the case with a product designed for export. So strong was his predisposition to live his life in the gaze of the Other that he wanted to die the way a tourist imagines a true Japanese should know how to die. . . . But in the real Japan, emotion and

malaise were at a peak—people felt directly touched . . . [by] the return of a repressed past, giving cause for alarm to the reigning pacifism.[40]

The opposition between the modern and the pre- or antimodern invariably carries overtones of a subterranean irrational threatening Other. This applies in De Vos's socio-psychological emphasis on Japanese deviance, in the identification of Mishima and seppuku with a lingering primitiveness, or with Julia Kristeva's assertion of a non-Western demonic energy that emerges from underground to burst open the modern episteme.[41] De Vos's stated goal was to "explore the peculiarly Japanese psychological patterns operative *beneath* their manifest success in modern economic development as well as in meeting other challenges of rapid social change. . . . [We have] explored persistent patterns of failure, deviancy, and alienation that *run concurrently in submerged channels from the premodern past into the frenetic present*" (4, emphasis added).

For De Vos deviance is marginal in relation to the dominant value system, which is not to say that it displaces that value system in a Derridean manner. To the contrary, De Vos as sociologist finds specific patterns of deviant behavior that "continue from one generation to the next," and which constitute "the ever present dark sides of what is expected, condoned, or praised" (4). Thus it may be said that Mishima's precise sense of order and time is only superficially out of character with the stereotype of the self-indulgent, chaos-ridden Romantic of pre-twentieth-century Europe. Beneath the surface lies the obsessive impulse toward control and its ultimate concretization—suicide—that, in what A. Alvarez calls the "closed world of the suicide," ensures the maniacal preparation of the minutest detail.[42] Mishima's seppuku, conveying as it did a Japanese romantic impulse with fascist overtones, emerges in postwar history, a neat twenty-five years after 1945, as a momentary revelation of certain repressed antimodern, antihumanist elements of Japan's modernization narrative. Mishima's own reconstruction of his life and text, the one intertwined with the other, involved the projection of a return of a premodern Japanese ethos. In his grand *Sea of Fertility*, in his stories and films based on the February 26 Incident, in essay works like *Sun and Steel* or in his reading of *Hagakure*, as in his life habits of work and exercise and political activities, Mishima focused on self-control and death as the vital but missing components of a dynamic Japanese national organism.

Two aspects of the Mishima phenomenon in particular convey these antimodern resonances: first, the romantic reconstruction of a nostalgic premodern samurai ideal—a "nobility of failure" syndrome (discussed below)—not by Japanese admirers, but by Western critics, and, juxtaposed

with the foregoing, the sense of national embarrassment generated by Mishima's seppuku in Japan itself; second, the ramifications of Mishima's suicide as a metaphor for self-control.

The romantic reading of Mishima as the hidden star of Japan's postwar economic success / spiritual failure story, hinting at the existence of a more authentic substratum of Japanese sensibility, is apparent in two almost self-effacing dedications to Mishima by American scholars in volumes not dealing with Mishima directly. In his translation of the eighteenth-century classic puppet play *Chūshingura*, published in the year after Mishima's death, Donald Keene places, just below a dedication to Yukio Mishima, two lines of Japanese classical verse in English transliteration.

> Kuni osamatte yoki bushi no chū mo buyū mo kakuru ni,
> tatoeba hoshi no hiru miezu yoru wa midarete arawaruru.[43]

The use of Japanese verse here in *rōmaji* (Latin transcription of Japanese) without benefit of translation is not a slap at pedantic Western scholars who include French, German, or Latin citations to force their readers to self-default into categories of more and less cultivated educated elites. It can only be intended for those few Japanese who might look at Keene's effort, or at those Westerners who would know enough Japanese to associate these words with the first few lines of the play. In any case, this dedication is not only cloaked in intrigue; it has concealment as its theme and, once understood, can only generate more intrigue on the part of the reader as to what the translator has in mind. The words complete an analogy between a classical Chinese aphorism ("The sweetest food, if left untasted, / Remains unknown, its savor wasted") and a description of a "country of peace," understood to be Japan. The lines cited in the dedication appear at this point to complete the analogy and are translated by Keene as

> The loyalty and courage of its fine soldiers remain hidden, but the stars, though invisible by day, at night reveal themselves, scattered over the firmament.[44]

The resonances here are many. Not the least is surely an allusion to the fact that Mishima's desire to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature was never realized.[45] Within that same allusion may be another to the effect that Mishima as a writer was somehow too Western in his style (both his life and his writing) and as such did not fit the Orientalist requirements of a European jury, which found Kawabata Yasunari more to their liking in 1968. In its quasi-mimicking of the intent of his quote, Keene's concealment of it in the text would appear to authenticate his conviction that Mishima did after all embody the genuine spirit of Japan,

but he was doomed to remain in obscurity in life and to shine only after death, as the stars get their chance to glitter only at night.

The play of associations multiplies here when the analogy is extended from military prowess to cultural dominance. For a scholar like Keene, who has devoted his life to trying to extend the gaze of his native West to the far shores of Japanese culture, the frustration of persistent ignorance in the West is surely a factor in his personal relation to Mishima's life and death. And it is all the more intense because of his own bipolar reading of Japan as a paradigm of modernity (with its Dazais as counterparts of Kafkas and Baudelaires) and as an embodiment of a unique, covert Otherness, inaccessible except perhaps by what he refers to elsewhere as the "unmistakable Japanese" quality of interpersonal relations and of "emotional responses to the moments of intensity in [one's] life."[46]

Keene's gesture is echoed in Ivan Morris's *The Nobility of Failure*. This book on Japanese "men of action" is also dedicated to Yukio Mishima, whose death scenario, although not dealt with in the text, is classed with the dramatic fates of those other "courageous losers" and, as such, is evocative of that "spontaneous sympathy" of the "Japanese, who since ancient times have recognized a special nobility in the sincere, unsuccessful sacrifice."[47] The paradigm here, warns Morris, is not to be confused with the Western romantic concept of the "hero as loser," of which Japan has its examples (Dazai presumably a prototype), but rather, in that inverted Orientalist mode, it is to be opposed to "our red-toothed, red-clawed world" and its worship of success.

> There is another type of hero in the complex Japanese tradition [who] represents the antithesis of an ethos of accomplishment. He is the man whose single-minded sincerity will not allow him to make the manœuvres and compromises needed for mundane success. (xiii)

There can be no doubt that Mishima, in a way not dissimilar to the staging of the multiple deaths by seppuku glorified in Mori Ōgai's account of "The Incident at Sakai," was also offering his Western public and friends a lesson. That his act was perceived as such is evidenced in the contrast between the recuperative efforts of Western critics to rationalize—if not actually "humanize"—this suicide and the embarrassed hostility of Japanese critics. In almost direct counterpoint to Morris's "nobility of failure," Japanese critics identified Mishima with what might be termed a "banality of failure." Yamazaki Masakazu spoke of Mishima's choice of "bad taste" over "tastelessness and called for a "rejection of the Mishima legacy."[48] And, in a review of a minor "Mishima boom" in the West, Ian Buruma contrasted this phenomenon with Japanese ambivalence about Mishima ("a combination of ridicule and unease, of reverence and titillation"). For Buruma, Mishima had been made into a "nonsub-

ject" in Japan, the object of "a kind of national conspiracy of silence, to blot out an embarrassing memory." Unlike the seriousness with which distinguished writers, critics, and filmmakers responded to him, Buruma found that "most Japanese [regard] Mishima's seppuku as little more than the pathetic act of a very gifted buffoon."[49]

It is almost appropriate to repeat Buruma's own words (as one is wont to do about dead writers) to the effect that "Mishima himself would no doubt have been pleased" at this (Buruma's) dismissal of his final act. It is not at all clear, however, that unease and hostility on the part of Japanese confirms this view of seppuku as a "pathetic act." For Maurice Pinguet, who notes that "people felt directly touched . . . [by] the return of a repressed past," Mishima is part of a larger narrative of suicide in Japan whose repressed elements are also essential to his project.[50]

Pinguet begins his study of suicide in Japan with a discussion of Cato's "harakiri," that "most glorious [suicide] in the history of the West," only then to reproach the West for its division, confusion, and reticence on the issue while praising Japan for "never having deprived itself in principle of the freedom to die" (9–10). Thus, in a manner not dissimilar to Roland Barthes's inverted hierarchization privileging Japanese over Western culture in his *Empire of Signs*, Pinguet argues that Japan's originality lies in the "absence of [that] metaphysics and idealism" which haunts the West.[51]

> It is Japan that may give hope to the West that it can escape that metaphysics, which is the enemy of proper limits, that it can dissipate the bad conscience which slanders everything in the name of Good, or mitigate the resentment of nihilism that labels nothingness not death but all that dies. There is no trace to be found in Japanese death of the nightmare that the fear of another world casts on the decision to die, all that which may be called the Hamlet obsession of the West. . . . [It is as if Japan] had understood that a vital part of greatness and serenity disappears when the freedom to die is removed from a civilization. (22)

Pinguet's analysis here suggests an appropriation of Japanese suicide as a foil for goading the West into shame for its self-neglect, for its lost former glory in that sacrosanct domain of personal freedom. This nostalgic appeal for a "lost" ideal of Western individualism, whether harking back to classical European civilization, as with Barthes and here Pinguet, or perhaps to an early utopian capitalist America, as with Ezra Vogel (see the Epilogue), is a familiar motivation in all the best Orientalist textual explorations. What is unexpected in Pinguet's text is the effort to transform Mishima's samurai escapade into an exercise in altruistic humanism. The "purity" of Mishima's act is considered enhanced by the fact that it eschews terrorism and vengeance: "The cause he defends demands sac-

rifices, but allows only those which are voluntary. . . . His violence in this respect is pure, and merits, if not sympathy, respect" (314).

If Mishima's suicide can be said to be pure, it is in the image it gives of the possibility of total control of a coherent subject over consciousness, body, language, and action. That Pinguet uses prominently the alternate term for suicide "la mort volontaire" (deliberate or willful death) speaks to the specific association he wishes to make with it as an act of self-conscious control. Mishima's act takes on its "universal" aspect in an exemplary Japanese moment, as it "illustrates so well the unlimited sovereignty of the man who chooses his own death" (316). If this view of a deliberate control of subject over body links Mishima to a premodern, authoritarian system of control, where, in Foucault's terms, suicide is a usurpation of the sovereign's power of death,[52] then the opposite pole of a more modern anomic suicide, associated with the social science connotations of Durkheim's term "le suicide," is represented by Dazai and involves an abdication of any desire for control. Dazai's suicide, or his series of four "failed" suicides followed by an ambiguous successful attempt, appears to undermine any semblance of or desire for control in death or life.

The contrast applies to their respective texts as well and is most revealing in those dealing with suicide. For example, Dazai's "Of Women," recounting the night prior to a double suicide attempt, and based on his own experience in which the woman died and he survived, is typical of his disjointed narrative style. This story, which incorporates a characteristically casual mention of the February 26, 1936 young officers' rebellion,[53] underscores the alienated/alienating effect of Dazai's fragmentary style, which, as he tells us in later works like "An Almanac of Agony" (1946), is intended to resist attempts "to twist events into coherent meaning, as this will only produce lies."[54] For Dazai, death is in no way a function of logical sequence, of the exercise of a subjective will. It is one possibility among a play of possibilities, and even suicide is absolutely contingent.[55]

How different is the textuality of Mishima's suicide narratives. Unlike Dazai's displacement of history and public event, by his private fragmentary consciousness, such that it becomes difficult (though not impossible) to link the individual to that other history of Japan in the 1930s, Mishima's story "Patriotism" is a move to absorb history within the consciousness of the individual actor.[56] A model of clear, synthetic prose with a unified narrative voice and perspective, this work brackets the historical event of the February 26 Incident on which it is based, only to enhance its effects in the double seppuku of Lieutenant Takeyama and his wife. Like the emperor in the emperor system, history here is pretextualized. For Mishima, the goal is not to denarrativize, but rather, via the glorifi-

cation of sex and seppuku, to erase the gap between individual and history. The accomplishment of seppuku in graphic sensational detail strives for presence and the possibility of full consciousness through the authority of the narrative just as for Dazai suicide confirms the impossibility of such control.

In taking these two literary suicides, Dazai and Mishima, as an emblematic reading of the "text" of postwar Japan, we may begin to suggest the dynamic, unstable nature of all such textualizations, whether they be nominally literature, history, or social science. By juxtaposing Dazai and Mishima as opposite poles, those ostensibly of a modernity and antimodernity, we become aware of the way in which they in fact share a common "marginality." Moreover, this very marginality can be seen as a product of a literary history and criticism that seek to affirm the centrality and stability of the critical establishment. By placing the Dazais and Mishimas at the liminal borders of respectability, the criticism reaffirms the essential necessity of its own role as a kind of shamanistic literary intermediary between the secure world of bourgeois comfort and the danger-ridden threshold of ideas, action, and people who threaten that comfort. The foreign critic is only a more obvious version of this syndrome, acting as a mediator (translator and interpreter) of an alien text/culture that only he or she can tame for the purpose of domestic consumption.

We have argued that these readings of Japan are informed by the modernization narrative. It may also be argued, however, that there is another implicit model of interpretation operative here, for the method of explanation of the Other is more often than not psychoanalytical. To the critic-analyst, Japan can remain modern and yet have its demonic underside. Like the modern individual who comports within him or her those biopsychological urges to a "primitive" violence, so Japan's modern image can fit the model of the nineteenth-century horror novels, a *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or a *Frankenstein*. If Dazai harks back to a benign and self-indulgent nineteenth-century decadence, Mishima can be said to raise the specter of a more disruptive, antimodern self-destructive urge, one that ironically may be "more than modern" in its schizophrenic transcultural cannibalism.

In the previous pages, we have introduced the modernization paradigm and its cultural concomitants (including various notions of self, individualism, and subjectivity as well as teleological and linear assumptions of modernity, progress, and democracy) in relation to Japanese literary history and criticism. In tracing the process whereby the literary imagination in Japan came to play a powerful adjunct role in the development of a national and nationalistic consciousness, we have paid particular note to the way in which historical instances of seppuku were transformed by such writers as Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki into quasi-

allegorical instances of third world nationalism. Almost in counterpoint to the sense of closure and confident overtones of anti-Western nationalism implicit in those traditional literary suicides, however, there may be detected a deepening sense of alienation on the part of Japan's intelligentsia, exemplified by the anguished loneliness of Japan's most famous literary suicide, the protagonist Sensei in Sōseki's *Kokoro*. The sense of desolation with which Sensei defines his own inability to come to terms with what he perceives to be the evil of the human heart, framed by a perception of a modern technological and imperialist society bereft of human trust, comes to stand for a Japan caught between East and West, between a past of confident community values and a future of bleak individual opportunism. The issue of Western individualism as a cornerstone of modernization and the concept of the self raised by Sōseki permeate twentieth-century Japanese culture.

Second, in investigating the role of suicide in the postwar development of Japan's modern national narrative, we sought to elucidate a modern/traditional dichotomy exemplified by the paradigmatic cases of Dazai and Mishima. The individual case histories and textual approaches of these two writers can be seen to express and constitute two poles of Japanese specificity in the modern world. The polarity evident in the juxtaposition of these two of Japan's most prominent postwar suicides opposes a menacing antimodernism against a lethargic modernism.

Having demonstrated these polar tendencies—progressive and regressive—constituting the modern literary perception of suicide, and having elicited the importance of the extraliterary for its interpretation, we now turn to that referential "signified," the sphere of social science, and examine its attention to the phenomenon of suicide. We will note above all the strong insistence on an association between writers and suicide, but even more the reliance of social scientists on "writers" as "subjects" and on their "texts" as "data" for their observations about suicide. In all cases, we call attention to the use of strategies that are characteristic of narrative fiction and whose appeal is often not to evidence, but to a paradoxical universality and difference.

*Chapter Two*

# TWO TALES OF SUICIDE: SOCIO-LITERARY COMPLICITIES IN JAPANESE MODERNIZATION

Suicide [seems] so central to contemporary writing.
—A. Alvarez, *The Savage God*

IN a December 1971 supplement, a leading Japanese literary journal invited an expert on suicide, Ōhara Kenshirō, to edit a special issue devoted to "Writers and Suicide."[1] Ōhara, in his introductory piece focusing on the relation of Japanese writers to suicide, suggested that individual nation-states appear to reflect distinctive vocational proclivities in the matter of voluntary death: in the United States, it is doctors who self-destruct; in Vietnam, it is Buddhist priests, who burn themselves to death; but "in our country, the high suicide rate is specific to writers" (17). Leaving aside the questionable inclusion of Vietnamese priests at the peak of the Vietnam war, we might, as Ōhara does, look at a standard collection of modern Japanese writers and find five familiar suicides among a hundred or so authors, giving us a rate of 500 (per 100,000, the standard measure) or one 300 times greater than the 16:1 ratio for Japanese males in 1967 (18).

Although the data-gathering techniques here may leave something to be desired, the general consensus in Japan is unequivocal in seeing a significant correlation between suicide and the literary life. Ōhara offers three suggestions as to why this may be the case: (1) the precariousness of the writer's life in terms of economic livelihood, social status, and the constraints of the teacher–disciple relation on artistic freedom; (2) the psychological pressure of having to be original, nonconformist, and creative, above all in Japan, where because of a tradition of tolerance and empathy toward suicide, there is a tendency to conflate the author's life, death, and work (the pressure here is intensified by the preponderance of autobiographical fiction in the form of the I-novel or *shishōsetsu*), such that "writers who can write only this kind of [I-novel] fiction inevitably find themselves stuck in the search for ideas and situations, with their only way out being to sacrifice the stability of their personal lives"; and (3) an apparent strong correlation between the lonely, alienated type of individual and an ability to articulate that sense of estrangement (17–18).

With the exception of the intriguing argument about the role of the *shishōsetsu* as a catalyst in suicide, an argument also elaborated by Masao Miyoshi,[2] the most telling factors here are the familiar constituent elements of a modern alienation process: decline of traditional economic and social status guarantees; psychological pressures brought on not only by the entry of creativity into the throes of free market competition, but also by the tension between the latter and the lingering persistence of traditional (teacher–disciple) structures; and the physical loneliness of the anonymous urban jungle as against a familiar familial rural environment. Suicide, in its "modern" guise, functions to authenticate this process of disintegration and thus to confirm an ultimately "progressive" course of transformation.

The modernization narrative, however, in its denial of any competitive ideological intent, and in its allocating to itself a disinterested "value-free" methodology, seeks to construct an interpretation of world development that inevitably represses other possible narratives, not the least of which is the Marxist one of class struggle. Social science plays a vital role in the construction of the modernization narrative by providing it with statistical tools for the classification and study of social phenomena. The resulting narrative may be said to be made up of nodes of signification whose presumed coherence appears to confirm the preprogrammed story of development or underdevelopment.

## Suicide East and West

> For a long time Japan was seen in the West as a country of spectacular holocausts with which was associated a heroic prestige, in acts ranging from traditional harakiri to the sacrifices of the kamikaze.
> —René Duchac, "Suicide au Japon, suicide à la japonaise"

It is a persistent irony of comparative studies that the study of the Other, the foreign, the different, ultimately reveals itself to be a search for the self, the familiar, the same. The fascination with suicide is no less an instance of this double stance. The very word "suicide," meaning the killing of the self, is fraught with uncertainty, implying as it does a search generated by a self toward a state beyond or without that self. The ramifications of this paradox for modern sociology and literature are especially relevant to Orientalist studies of the Other as they are to Occidentalist attempts to become the Other.

The image of Japan in the West continues its protean existence, lending itself to a variety of interchangeable labels. Although the word "ho-

locaust" that appears in the above epigraph is hardly the term to describe these statistically insignificant and special forms of suicide, the image it evokes of Japan is familiar worldwide. Even as unusual an instance as Mishima's seppuku in 1970 was to be seen (not least by the ruling Satō government) as an indication of lingering primitiveness.[3] For Mishima himself, who knew that, of all possible acts, seppuku would be seen as specifically Japanese and anti-Western, this gesture was intended to awaken a dormant Japanese spirit, one that the leaders and institutions of modern Japan preferred to keep in harness.

### *Reluctant Sociologist*

To Mishima's posthumous chagrin, perhaps, the perception of difference continues to exist only in a rarefied and abstract atmosphere. The phenomenon of suicide, belying its own history, is seen only as a sign of the invisible "gap" between the Western and Japanese psyches. This appears to be the case even in the anesthetized realm of sociology, where suicide first gained prominence with Durkheim as a measure for studying society. A more contemporary sociologist's treatment of the issue is symptomatic and revealing. Let us examine how René Duchac's study of suicide in Japan shifts from a presumably scientific register ("suicide au Japon") to a "national character" approach ("suicide à la japonaise").[4]

> It would appear not only from statistical analysis but also from consideration of *several* cases of suicide *which came to our attention during this past year living in Japan* that the importance of the problem, *in this country*, is not only quantitative. . . . One finds a number of cases, *even today*, which cannot be *explained entirely* by psycho-social factors for which we could find equivalents in comparable societies, but which become *much more intelligible* by reference to certain *specifically national* motivations which only history and traditional values are *likely to make meaningful*. In other words, *suicide in Japan is still very often Japanese-style suicide (suicide à la japonaise)*. We find in it *specific characteristics which refer uniquely* to Japanese society, and which can be correctly interpreted only by sufficient knowledge of national character. (403, emphasis added)

Duchac happens to be writing in Japan in the early 1960s and relying essentially on 1950s data. He himself notes that the high suicide rate in Japan is "both a recent and limited phenomenon" (403) with a decline apparent already since the early 1960s, and that the reliability of the statistics spanning the prewar and postwar periods are in doubt. Later sources indicate that the Japanese suicide rate was indeed high in the mid-50s, but had declined considerably by the mid-60s. In both past and

present statistics, it has been the below-thirty age groups where the rate has been highest.[5] The exigencies of textuality, however, call for a story worth telling. Thus Duchac admits that "were we writing for a Japanese public, it would be better to 'demythologize' the problem of suicide rather than to sensationalize it" (402). In any event, Duchac's own intention is to do neither but rather to stake out his claim of objectivity: "Our role here is but to describe a situation, and that includes [describing] the misinforming of the public and the persistence of its anxiety [about suicide]" (402).

Seeing suicide as a "menace épidemique partout présente et diffuse," not to mention as "an ethnic characteristic of the Japanese people," Duchac attributes the "angoisse du suicide" in Japan to a lack of up-to-date information as well as to the tendency of Japanese writers and journalists to sensationalize. Yet what ultimately structures Duchac's work, and what makes it so pertinent to the study of suicide across cultures and literatures, is its smug assurance that whatever its author cannot understand is peculiar to Japan. Thus he comes away from a talk with Japanese scholars on the issue of family suicides convinced that their understanding of such cases ("rather sympathetic") must be "specifically Japanese." The explanation proffered, to the effect that the child is seen as an appendage of the parents, who are in turn concerned about the subsequent survival and trauma of the child, is labeled "Japanese," as are several cases that the author happens to read about in the newspaper. The ultimate criterion for mentioning these random instances is that "they *seem to us to conform to types* of traditional attitudes, and in this sense, they can be characterized as *specifically Japanese* opinions" (414, emphasis added).

In his section titled "From Statistics to Motivation," Duchac indicates one of the fundamental problems common to all suicidology—the difficulty of ascertaining precise motivation. Shifts in language and values over time, the ambiguity of the terms themselves, and the silence of victims, families, and police are only some of the problems the suicidologist must confront. Duchac is dissatisfied above all with the "banality" of the statistics, wherein terms like "family conflict" or "emotional problems" somehow put a suicide in Tokyo on the same level as a suicide in New York, Paris, or Brazzaville. "The particular form that these conflicts may take in Japan is in no way conveyed by the impersonal labels used to designate them" (412). What is missing, in a word, is reference to such terms as "love suicides," for which, Duchac stresses, there is even a special word, *shinjū*. Not that he argues very strenuously for a relation between *shinjū* in premodern and in contemporary Japan. Nor does he consider the parallels with "lovers' leaps" of the West. The incontrovertible fact of specificity is enough to "show us what a distance there can be

between the statistical description of [family] conflicts and their *real* character" (412, emphasis added). The ideal study of suicide, he argues, must take into account the full psycho-sociological dimension involved. Moreover, it should deal with the "spectacular" aspect of suicide in Japan, according to which suicide is explicitly an act as much against others as against oneself.

At this point, Duchac performs a sleight of pen. After suggesting that "all of these heroic forms of suicide were maintained until the last war," he goes on to remark that "it is not sure that the prestige accorded to these suicides . . . has entirely disappeared from public opinion." From this insignificant observation, he then proceeds to describe statements gleaned in interviews and cases extracted from the newspapers as vestiges of "traditional attitudes, unexpected echoes" (413).

In other words, once one knows what one is looking for, "it is not difficult to find a great number of cases which may similarly be called *specifically Japanese*" (414). What is it about these suicides that makes Duchac want to label them "specifically Japanese"? Surely not the methods of self-destruction, since these are today and have probably always been similar to those used elsewhere.[6] "The case need only be congruent with traditional attitudes such that we may affirm a certain persistence of these attitudes" (414). Let us cite Duchac's final words on Japanese suicide, for they reveal the ultimate gap between the universalism that social science aspires to and the Orientalism that continues to condition it.

> To the busy traveler, the Japan of today, powerfully industrial, thoroughly educated, highly urbanized, has more the appearance of the American way of life than of the closed society it was for so long. Yet, we would be underestimating the fidelity of the Japanese people to its traditions, i.e., to their own selves, were we to see in the adoption of modern technology and institutions a tendency to abandon the ways of old. In Japan, culture is far more cumulative than it is evolutionary, and nothing that once existed is ever completely lost. It would be surprising if Japanese attitudes toward death could be changed more rapidly than others. But even this is explainable. *The techniques used in social science are in certain cases too universally trivial for a culture so particular and so different from all others as that of Japan.*
>
> (415, emphasis added)

## *The Thematic Transcendental*

The dilemma of suicide is highlighted by the cross-disciplinary borrowing (complicity) apparent in both sociological and literary studies. Duchac's sociology ends up affirming that the Japanese style of suicide

points to the survival of a specifically Japanese culture beneath a superficial veneer of Western modernity. Literature, meanwhile, has the privileging claim made for it as "one of the oldest disciplines to treat suicide."[7] When it comes to suicide, literature for the literary critic is no longer the reflector of irreducible cultural differentiation, the repository of the untranslatable; rather it is the common denominator not only for contemporaneous cultures, but for the "universal configuration of human concerns" beyond time and place. Duchac, the sociologist, meanwhile forsakes the universalist methodological project of sociology as being too "trivializing" of the cultural specificity of Japan and searches instead for the "cultural message" between the lines in order to confirm the existence of an irreducible difference.

The result is a textual dilemma of import for any critical piece of writing. The dichotomy between social science and literature/literary criticism on the one hand, as well as between literary and nonliterary texts on the other, is unstable. And the reason, to be suggested by later observers like Roland Barthes, is that Japan is itself an unstable text and not a mere "reality" that need only be set in black and white on a page.[8] It is indeed only because we perceive it as a text that we can juxtapose the temporally and geographically unrelated phenomena of Western and Japanese literature, or of a string of newspaper incidents and random conversations, observations, and statistics on paper in the form of words intelligible to a trained reader.

Behind both texts (Japan and the West), however, is a similar perception of the world as a dichotomous entity housing "us" and "them." The ideological conviction that "Westerners" are part of the advanced, civilized world in struggle with a primitive, and potentially hostile "other" is shared by Western scholars of sociology and literature alike. Transcendental identities of honor, love, and creativity mask a twentieth-century Orientalist "mission" to place "them" on a level with "us."[9] Duchac prefers to see "them" as embodying the mysterious demonic passion no longer available to him in France or in the West, at least not in the sterile confines of social science academia. The foray into such uncharted wildernesses is always restrained by the explorer's assurance that civilization and bourgeois morality will allow one to discern value and *return* to civilization *to tell the tale*. For without the narrative of one's journey, the "Orient" or the "other" would have no value. And the value it does have will be a function of the institutional context (discursive power) of which it is a part. The same holds true for suicide, which assumes value or interest only to the extent that its narrative fits the requisite discursive paradigm. In the case of Japan in the twentieth century, that paradigm is modernity, and the subtext of suicide in its modern prototype, repre-

sented by the alienated writer, may be seen as a narrative material reflecting the value of Japan as a modern capitalist nation.

The opaqueness of the concept of suicide, cloaked as it is in undecidability, however, allows it to speak to the inherent bipolarity of Japan's ambivalent modernity. Japan seems to rise and fall in the eyes of the West, wearing its changeable masks of modernizing ally/traitorous enemy, individualistic democracy/mass collective. Its sameness and difference relative to the West are measured by its success at assimilating those "cornerstones of European humanism" like the self.[10] But what is perceived as difference/resistance to the modernization narrative can conveniently be ascribed to the superficiality of the import, the insufficiency of modernization, or the persistence of an essential, unchanging, and inaccessible/impenetrable (thus hostile and threatening) Japanese Other beneath the veneer of modernity.

### *Syntagmatic Suicide: Generating the Text*

> The story of suicide is as old and thrilling as the story of man. . . . [It] is the living story of man's various social, economic, and religious problems.
> —Upendra Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India*

Also elided in literary critics' treatment of suicide is the issue of discursive power. For the critic of Japanese literature, it becomes important to argue not only that a "literary suicide" confirms the modern alienation of the Japanese writer, but that the writer's texts can then be seen to be a measure of the quality of that alienation. What is striking to note in the treatment of writers like Dazai is how both critic and social scientist seek (and find) a measure of progress toward a "truly alienated reality." This perception of modernization rests on a Japanese individuation process, wherein the Japanese are increasingly seen to develop a sense of that individualistic self that had somehow eluded them for so long. The culminating or corroborative indicator of this individuation process becomes suicidal self-alienation, that state in which the modern individual seeks to take back control of his or her self by preempting its destruction.[11]

There is a sense in which the "story of suicide," a history of a human act repeated by different individuals across time and space, necessarily precedes our perception of the individual suicide as an attempt to narrate, to tell a story, to communicate. As with all communication, moreover, in order for an individual suicide to take on meaning, it must conform to the requirements of particular codes. For suicide to be recognized as such, it must involve an act and an intention, although the

act may or may not convey intention. Consequently, the suicide can be labeled as such only by those in a position of expressive authority: police, government, clergy, doctors, psychiatrists, journalists, writers, critics. The historian or social scientist syntagmatically lays these acts side by side, always on paper, and thus generates a story of suicide. The individual suicide, however, becomes narrative by the juxtaposition of a demonstrated intent to die with a plausible act whose outcome is death. And yet, even Durkheim indicated that the determination of intention was often impossible and opted instead for a problematic "emphasis on the anticipation of outcome."[12] Numerous cases of accidental death may be suicides and vice versa. Both Dazai Osamu's and Sylvia Plath's deaths (see the discussion below) are cases in point, for in both there was doubt as to whether *this time* they genuinely intended to die. One can understand the frustration of the social scientist, for both the definition of suicide and the determination of the act will vary considerably over time, between nations and states, and according to laws, mores, and other variable criteria. To take one example, because suicide was still considered a criminal act in England as late as 1961, numerous cases were not reported as such. Social mores in general may deter families from declaring a kin's death a suicide. In 1968, the World Health Organization prefaced its suicide mortality statistics thus: "The true incidence of suicide is hard to ascertain. Varying methods of certifying causes of death, different registration and coding procedures, and other factors affect the extent and completeness of coverage, making international comparisons impracticable."[13]

There are two aspects to be noted here. One is the late-nineteenth-century locus of Durkheim's *Suicide* (1897) and its linkage with the rise of world capitalism, imperialism, and concomitant ideological constructs of individual freedom and free enterprise, the latter adequately manifest in the rise of the novel as well as in theories of criticism. As Michel Foucault comments, "It is not surprising that suicide . . . became, in the course of the nineteenth century, one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis."[14] In Foucault's perception of modernity, the sovereign's right to impose death underwent a shift parallel to other transformations in the mechanisms of power, which had previously involved "essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself" (136) as evidence of the sovereign's right and ability to defend himself. In the modern age, sovereign power has instead come to involve the ability to generate, foster, and order growth. "The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (139–140). In this context, then, suicide, which had been seen as a crim-

inal act because it usurped the power of death of the monarch or of God, shifts into the private sphere, where it takes on a new symbolic value.

> It testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die . . . was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life. (139)

This new symbolic value of suicide could only make the indeterminacy of intention more acute. Like the history of literary criticism,[15] how much of the story of suicide is based on the assumption of a willful intention to express a particular meaning or message? And by extension, does not suicidology, like literary criticism and interpretation, rise and fall (or move in zigzag fashion) in relation to their perception of intention?

Suicide is thus above all an imaginative construct, which, like writing or the literary act, must generate a narrative, whose physical manifestation is the demonstration of intention to a reader or public. The suicide is not unlike an author in relation to his or her work, trying to control his or her perception of a text/self as an unstable, incohesive entity. By dying/writing, the issue of intent, of meaning, is diffused, disseminated in the text and in death. Only traces of that intent, the words of the book, the suicide note, or other data used to constitute a textual facsimile, may then be manipulated by interested parties (reader, critic, family, police) to formulate and reformulate interpretations to suit their needs. Like a physical text, an apparent suicide (no less than the homicide) is a puzzle, a mystery, a tangle to be unraveled. Like all good literature, the mystery must combine suspense and intrigue with motive and intention if it is to be a story worth being told.

What Hayden White has shown with regard to history, that its language and structure are permeated with narrative techniques and codes, is no less true of the social sciences.[16] Each discipline is concerned with explaining acts and behavior and with assigning these their proper place in an established discourse, which is more often than not itself part of a larger "master narrative." In this respect, suicide will be seen to fit into various schemes, depending on the "author." For Durkheim, suicide is a social act; for Freud it is displaced aggression; for the scholar of religion or the philosopher it is the occasion for speculation on life and death; and for the biologist it may involve species survival. For the writer, suicide is a literary act. Perhaps, as Melvyn Faber puts it, suicide, as "the anagram of motivation, . . . becomes from the literary angle, a metaphor."[17] As such, it functions metaphysically both in literature and in society, in the same manner as other social and economic institutions (marriage, money) to reinforce (or contest) a certain set of beliefs or behavior.

### *Paradigmatic Suicide: Metaphor of Modernity*

> Because suicide inevitably gives expression to what prompts it . . . , it becomes . . . a metaphor.
> —Melvyn D. Faber, "Shakespeare's Suicides"

The process of textual generation takes place syntagmatically, yet it follows a repeatable pattern, a paradigm. Suicide may be as old as human civilization, or of all life itself, but the perception of it appears to change radically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The transformation of Europe and Japan into "modern societies" entails a corresponding transformation of their respective traditions of suicide. Previous to this period of critical dislocation, "aristocratic suicide" had evolved in Japan as in the West, involving the elaboration of distinctive methods, rituals, and justifications. The aristocratic tradition developed often enough in contrapuntal distinction to a more plebian tradition. In Japan, *bushidō* (the way of the warrior) and seppuku are codified in the Tokugawa period as commercial bourgeois culture glorifies its own, more emotional form of "love suicide" (*shinjū*). In Europe, a Romantic infatuation with suicide, glorified by actual deaths and eulogies to the dead, contrasts with a more philosophical justification of suicide intoned by the likes of John Donne and Montaigne. As industrialization takes root and uproots, in each case a rational or stoic tradition interacts with a "frivolous" romantic or nostalgic antimodern tendency. Compulsory seppuku, demoded from its status as sanctioned punishment in 1868, continues as a form of self-sacrifice with antimodern overtones.

Perhaps the distinguishing feature of "modern" suicide is that its status, no longer a function of state sanction, has been relegated to the private sector. Not unlike other areas of social life, once removed from the direct supervision of the state, the status and interpretation of suicide become a matter of contention among special interest groups. Thus, when national television in the United States decided to show a film taken by artist Jo Roman's husband depicting her preparations for suicide over a two-year period, it also felt the need to surround the "spectacle" with a battery of "experts," including a sociologist, a psychiatrist, and a priest.[18] Jo Roman's programmatic suicide, though less sensational, was not dissimilar to Mishima Yukio's spectacular seppuku in 1970.[19] Both called forth hostility from those apprehensive about rocking the ship of modernity (on what Mishima would have considered its destinationless voyage in the pursuit of vacant happiness and endless joyful consumption) and a quiet admiration on the part of those nostalgic for a semblance of individual discipline or control at least over their personal destinies.

Yet these two cases stand out in the public mind as exceptions to the

rule. The image of the modern suicide is less an outgrowth of these premodern "rational" traditions than it is a reassertion of a Western romantic tradition of suicide. Intimately bound up with notions of self, victimization, despair, and revolt, the modern suicide is equated with the alienated individual up against a cold, machine-like industrial and postindustrial society. If on the one hand suicide is seen sociologically as a symptom of a diseased civilization, resulting from the breakdown of traditionally cohesive social organizations, from family to church, it is also portrayed in literature as something akin to what Fredric Jameson has in another context referred to as the "sole remaining ultimate protests in a total system view of contemporary society."[20] Whereas suicide, via sociology, becomes a thermometer for gauging the extent of a society's industrialization, urbanization, economic crisis, or rural and familial disintegration, playwrights and novelists seek the ultimate representation of individual freedom and find it in madness, murder, and suicide. The words of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890) appear to echo across the oceans to Japan. Upon learning of Lovberg's death, which she assumes was a "beautiful" act of suicide, Hedda declares: "It's liberating to know that there can still actually be a free and courageous action in this world."[21] And when she discovers that Lovberg did not die in such a deliberate, clear-cut manner, she decides that she must realize her ideal of a free, spontaneous act by her own suicide. Among Dostoevsky's numerous suicides (seventeen fictional characters kill themselves), the "victim-suicides" are paralleled by several egoistic (in Durkheim's sense of abnormal asocial individualism) suicides, of whom Kirilov of *The Possessed* exclaims: "I am bound to shoot myself because the highest point of my self-will is to kill myself with my own hands."[22]

Nonetheless, this type of glorified suicide as the ultimate affirmation of individual freedom fits the modernization narrative nicely. Since the latter, in its social science phase, posits an initial absence of individualism in Japan only to identify its increasing prominence, above all in literature, as a sign of successful modernization, it need only discover literary epigones of nineteenth-century European literature. Literary critics, who in turn base much of their reading of Japanese literature on the presumably firmer foundations of social science research, find themselves accomplices in embellishing the modernization narrative. For a critic like Masao Miyoshi, whose view of the modern Japanese novel involves the genesis of a paradigmatic Japanese esthetics of silence, there is explicit acknowledgment of a debt to "those extraliterary essays on the Japanese personality by people like Nakane Chie, Ruth Benedict, Edward Norbeck, Inatomi Eijiro, and Herman Kahn, who have stressed, as I do, that the Japanese attitude toward personality . . . is basically profoundly negative."[23]

Perhaps because, unlike the above "extraliterary" social scientists, the French sociologist Duchac is not a scholar of Japan able to read in the vernacular, his dissatisfaction with social science does not quite lure him all the way to literature, as a similar frustration does the American anthropologist George De Vos, as we shall presently see. Duchac's "reluctant sociology" suggests a person who is averse to what he sees as the dehumanizing, depersonalizing—even demystifying—effect of his own universalist scientific enterprise. Our project here is not to psychoanalyze the sociologist or to explain why he wants to find Japan "different from all the others." It is rather to insist on the way in which the study of suicide as a modern social phenomenon in Japan seems to predispose social scientists to assertions of cultural essentialism, and to generate their own narratives of modernization wherein the most representative instance of suicide is the alienated writer, who then by the same token serves the literary critic as a sign of Japan's cultural modernization. The paradox—or aporia of their text—is that the very marker of alienation, suicide, in turn generates in the texts of both critic and social scientist a "hidden" narrative of antimodern or premodern unchanging and irreducible difference. As we have seen, this bivalence of suicide applies to both poles of Japan's postwar narrative of suicide, that of the anomic or "meek" writer like Dazai, perhaps the *ijimerarekko* (bullied child) of the 1980s, as well as that of the tough and "mighty" Mishima, the counterpart or symbiotic sine qua non of the polarity, the *ijimekko* (bullier).

## *The Lure of Literature*

In the previous chapter, we introduced one of the major American works on Japanese society, the 1973 study by George De Vos titled *Socialization for Achievement: Essays on the Cultural Psychology of the Japanese.*[24] In considering again this work's overall project and its particular focus on suicide and alienated writers, we may note how it demonstrates several propensities on the part of social scientists to succumb to narrative temptation.

1. Like Duchac, De Vos links the notion of "modern" in Japan to what he perceives as a "continuing" native cultural "pattern" or "tradition" that is somehow impervious to the (externally derived) modernization process and yet which paradoxically accounts for the latter's success (or on occasion its equally significant failure). For De Vos the language of scholarship is reinforced by the universalist rhetoric of social science, only to reveal in its interstices an almost emotional appeal to the opaqueness of an "unreconstructible" subterranean native Japanese psyche. What Japan shares with the rest of human society is the tendency to generate "culture patterns that remain functionally autonomous." These pri-

mary socialization patterns are transmitted through interpersonal family structures such as child-rearing and emotional conditioning. Their apparent resistance to change, as during modernization, is what motivates De Vos to undertake his ambitious program. "In tracing Japanese history back into the premodern period, I try to demonstrate how a 'Japanese' culture has persisted in spite of self-conscious modernization" (2).

2. The second point to note is the inevitable accompaniment of the modernization paradigm by its Orientalist nemesis, the dichotomy of West and East, us and them. "We notice a trend *similar to that in the West* over the past eighty years toward defining the *essential* problem [of alienation] more and more as one occurring *within the individual*, rather than *simply* as a state of tension between the individual and his society" (490, emphasis added). As the modernization model requires, the opposition between West and East is accompanied by a set of corresponding coordinates that leave no doubt as to their hierarchical assumptions: modern/premodern; individual (psychological, subjective)/social; essential/nonessential; sophisticated/simple.

3. Third, we may note the syndrome that is a theme of the present chapter. The De Vos text is both victim and perpetrator of the type of socio-literary complicity endemic to the modernization narrative. As with narrative in general, the generative mechanism of the text here is a mystery that the author seeks to unravel: "I strongly hoped that it was possible to objectify and communicate what is so deeply subjective and hidden from view in the functioning of human beings" (xi). As with psychoanalytic criticism and psychoanalysis, the cultural psychology applied is also prone to weave its own text in order to conform to certain assumptions. Thus does De Vos, in chapter 17, titled "Role Narcissism and the Etiology of Japanese Suicide," seek to integrate a psychoanalytic approach with Durkheim's causality theory, concluding that the Japanese are particularly inclined to suicides involving role narcissism (i.e., the lack of a close maternal experience involving a traditional woman's role dedication pattern is said to lead to a profound sense of alienation). Chapter 18 then, in order to give expression to its argument, introduces the alienated writer of Japan: Sōseki, Akutagawa, and Dazai are discussed under the rubric "Alienation and the Author: A Triptych on Social Conformity and Deviancy in Japanese Intellectuals."

4. The selection of Japanese writers as exemplary representatives of the alienated intellectual and, moreover, as the best articulators of modern alienation is suggestive and problematic. It is surely noteworthy that De Vos uses the autobiographical texts of the writers themselves to narrate his own text of Japanese alienation. The issue of representativeness is subordinated to several other factors that may be deemed narrative requisites rather than social science criteria. De Vos explains how he has

become "critical of social science generalizations that [leave] out the intense reality of personal experience" because they do not "adequately consider the wellsprings of human motivation" (1). His language here reveals his literary bent, his desire to tell a good story, suggesting in turn that he is predisposed to intellectuals and writers because their stories are more convincing to him, and hence more valid. Having undergone psychoanalysis himself, De Vos may be more inclined to recognize familiar patterns in the voluminous writings of Sōseki, Akutagawa, and Dazai. That his project is now literary psychobiography seems apparent when he tells us that "it is most difficult but hopefully not impossible to enter into the state of mind of an individual to understand his motivation to suicide" (438). And that this project entails the generating of a socio-literary text, of a coherent story, is suggested by his next remark: "However, to understand fully, not only must we look at conscious subjective motives for suicide, but one must also look for the dilemma or crisis leading to suicide as originating in processes not conscious to the suicidal individual" (438).

5. Although De Vos maintains that alienation per se is "not specific to modern society," he does argue that "the problem [has been made] more manifest and more socially visible than in the past" (487). If, then, the problem has been a constant of Japanese society and cultural psychology, the shift to modernity would seem to involve only a more articulated expression of that alienation. This argument calls for, and produces, a more heightened "sense" of alienation among an "articulate minority" of intellectuals, subsequently delimited to "the novelist or playwright" (490) and then even more rigorously to "some few authors" (for, admittedly, "not all authors become or remain alienated"). Despite De Vos's disavowal of alienation as specific to modern society, his argument requires that the writer's sense of alienation reflect a specifically modern alienation. Thus, "today . . . the novelist or playwright is very often expressing the lack of purpose or the quandary of direction experienced by modern man" (490).

To be sure, De Vos is following Durkheim's association and definition of a particular form of suicide, egoistic, with a "form of alienation experience common to many intellectuals." In Durkheim's words, "the intellectual and meditative nature of suicides of this sort is readily explained, if you recall that an egoistic suicide is necessarily accompanied by a high development of knowledge and reflective intelligence. . . . The mind that questions everything, unless strong enough to bear the weight of its ignorance, risks questioning itself and being engulfed in doubt" (cited by De Vos, 489–490).

It is clear that De Vos himself does not suffer from such doubts, however, in asserting the modernity of Japanese intellectuals and associating

their very narrative mode (tragedy here) with alienation and suicide. "We do feel confident . . . [that] whatever individual Japanese author had been chosen, we would have found it possible to illustrate from his works cultural changes occurring within Japanese modernization that shift the emphasis of the origin of human tragedy occasioned by outer social circumstances to tragedy as an internal human state" (564).

6. De Vos's narrative of suicide and modernization thus erects a structure of marginalization, involving the alienated suicidal writer, which is labeled the most expressive of modernity (a subjective internal human state of tragedy) and upon which is conferred the imprimatur of ultimate authenticity and social recognition by virtue of its narrative effectiveness (i.e., its ability to stir the emotions). "The sense of alienation lends to the work of some few a depth of poignant feeling; alienation coupled with disciplined talent make for a sense of greatness that is honored by the society" (487).

The narrative is lent authenticity then by a reduction and concentration of the sine qua non of cultural modernity to the creative abilities of a marginalized (suicidal) few. The argument of De Vos, coming from the realm of the social sciences, thus conflates with those of literary critics like Alvarez, whose book is generated by his perception of suicide as "so central to contemporary writing."[25] In the next section, we will consider Alvarez's study of suicide and literature and will demonstrate how his text is itself a disguised autobiography in a decidedly romantic mode, designed to attach what can only be described as a literary pedigree to the author himself or, inversely, to attach his name to the aristocratic lineage of suicides that he has constructed. Before examining this highly refined use of suicide, however, let us consider briefly a very different set of perceptions, one sociological and one literary, both of them calling into question the dominant narrative of suicide.

First, we note a point made in passing by De Vos that is not given full consideration, one that appears almost as a social scientific "lapse."

> Status concerns are much more pronounced in middle-class than in lower-class individuals. To some degree, this phenomenon is worldwide; overall statistics show differences in class background related to suicide. In countries with chronically abject poverty there is usually a relatively low rate of suicide. (546)

Second, consider black poet Audre Lorde's reflection on suicide and black people. When she intones that "Black People Do Not Commit Suicide,"[26] she is ironizing the tendency for suicide as a middle-class phenomenon to be seen as the sign of a civilized, modern Western society. The irony in her poem reflecting on the Jamestown incident, in which hundreds of cult followers, mostly black, died in what was called a collective suicide, is that people who die for economic reasons or because of

brutality and overt oppression are somehow "understandable." As such, they are perhaps "less interesting" to press and sociologist alike, for they are not as able to articulate the "full reality" of their suffering, which is somehow thus relegated to an underdeveloped (pre-middle-class) status. The latter would presumably also apply to American business suicides or the suicidal massacre, where an individual shoots family, friends, and especially strangers prior to his or her own death. The alienation here, while deriving from an inability to "adjust" to a modern social reality, is somehow "explainable." What Lorde the poet argues against is the use of suicide either to include or exclude blacks from a "normal" modernity and a "full reality" of their own making. Blacks are already precluded from the benefits of that modernity and can only resist having even their deaths used as signs of their powerlessness.

## Suicidal Genealogies

A. Alvarez's *The Savage God* appears to stand alone among studies of suicide in its concern to probe the imaginative structure of the act. A writer of poetry and fiction himself, Alvarez is also—like his personal friend and the inspiration for his work, Sylvia Plath—a failed suicide.[27] This piece of autobiographical information, first hinted at obliquely in the preface, then suggested a bit more broadly in the lengthy prologue devoted to Plath's suicide, and finally revealed in melodramatic intensity in an epilogue, is, as may be surmised from the carefully dropped hints and the delicate draping of the intertwined Plath-Alvarez stories around the main narrative, hardly accidental.[28] The fact that both are writers and poets, as are the cast of characters of *The Savage God* (notwithstanding the more broad-based ambition of its subtitle as "a study of suicide"), points to the prevalent assumption of a special relation between suicide and literature, especially in the modern age, as Alvarez himself suggests throughout.

In order to appreciate the role of literary suicide as an indicator of modernity in Japan, it will be helpful to consider its paradigmatic status in Western literature. An analysis of Alvarez's approach to the problem will provide the necessary direction for an evaluation of a similar process in the Japanese case. We may then consider the deconstructive thrust of Dazai's suicides (in life and art) as well as their recuperation by the literary establishment.

### *A Genial Genealogy*

*The Savage God* is an attempt to construct a genealogy of genius, of the gifted, exceptional intellectual. Its membership, clearly distinguished from the indiscriminate masses, are sensitive, romantic writers in whom

a proclivity toward suicide is linked with creativity and aristocratic brilliance. It is hard not to see A. Alvarez as a man intent on eating his cake and having it too, or in this instance, laying claim to the experience of suicide while enjoying in life the immortality bequeathed by premature death.

The curious structure of his book provides a convenient loose thread for us to unravel. It begins with a preface recounting two suicides that proved traumatic for the author, the first by a physics teacher when Alvarez was a schoolboy, the second that of his friend, the poet Sylvia Plath. The preface leads into a lengthy prologue detailing Alvarez's acquaintance with Plath and an account and appreciation of her death. Following this is a chronological overview of suicide in the West (from Greco-Roman times up to the Middle Ages), provided as "Background," and by an excursus on "Fallacies," "Theories," and "Feelings," grouped under a section titled "The Closed World of Suicide." The main part of the book is a multichapter discourse on the postmedieval history of suicide in Western culture, followed by a section titled "The Savage God," an essayistic reflection on the relation between suicide and art in the modern period. A final epilogue, "Letting Go," details the author's own attempted suicide.

In a tone reminiscent of Duchac and De Vos, who both found the story of suicide in Japan too special to be conveyed by statistics, Alvarez inveighs against the clinical abstraction of the available literature on suicide: "It is as though the procedures necessary to a scientific understanding of suicide had made the subject unreal" (87).[29] His decision to begin with Sylvia Plath and to end with "a detailed case history" (his own), he tells us, is thus to allow him to root suicide in "the human particular" and to view it through the perspective of literature in order to see how and why suicide "colors the imaginative world of creative people." For Alvarez, as for De Vos, it is the artist, by vocation more aware of motivation and more articulate, who should "offer illuminations which the writings of sociologists, psychiatrists, and statisticians lacked" (xi).

Throughout Alvarez intends to steer a course of "serious intent" between what he perceives as "that high religious tone which dismisses suicide in horror" (whether on moral, criminal, or pathological grounds), and the "current scientific fashion which . . . manages to deny it all serious meaning by reducing despair to the boniest statistics" (xii). The priority here is to be on a middle ground of expressive "feelings," on that which moves the emotions, and on the articulation of suffering.

This intended mode of articulated feeling builds to a crescendo toward the end of the book, where it emerges in the author's concept of artistic intelligence (247), associated with the Extremist poets, above all Sylvia Plath, and, as we shall argue, with Alvarez himself and his "study of sui-

cide." If this observation suggests that the book is indistinguishable from its method and goal, it may be the result of the author's persistent efforts to maintain the opposite, by a succession of dichotomies and polar oppositions of ends and means. All these oppositions can be shown to derive from the undecidability of intention, including the ultimate opposition for Alvarez, that of successful and failed suicides.

### *Suicidal Oppositions*

What is to become a steady delineation of opposite types involving a not so subtle hierarchization is already evident at the outset when Sylvia Plath, who has been described to the author as "very sharp and intelligent" (4), subsequently conforms to his image of her as "serious, gifted, withheld," unlike her husband, poet Ted Hughes, who is presented as a polished, intense, technical craftsman, but above all as the "massive shadow" behind which Plath's very special "dislocating and dislocated quality" (28) is hidden. It is Alvarez himself, as both narrator and author of his story, who "discovers" for us Plath's genius. Her poetry, arrived in his mailbox, appears as the "rare thing: the always unexpected genuine article" (9). As she "emerges" from Hughes's shadow, Alvarez sees her in the line of Donne, Keats, and Eliot, whose "particular gift is to clarify and intensify the received world," with the qualification that "her intensity was of the nerves . . . [and] was also, in its way, more intellectual than Ted's" (28). Already implicit here is Alvarez's comparison of Plath's and Hughes's poetry, to be developed in his climactic juxtaposition of traditional Romanticism and Extremist Art. As in their life together, where she effected "a triumph of mind over ectoplasm," her poetic expression, "often more powerful, is a by-product of a compulsive need to understand" (29).

There is also a presaging here of Alvarez's ultimate privileging of failed suicide over successful suicide. It gradually becomes apparent that it is the *risk* of death in suicide rather than the successful accomplishment of the act that marks artistic genius. Thus it should not be surprising that Alvarez is "convinced . . . that this time she did not intend to die" (33). Preferring to see her death as "a cry for help that misfired," a cry intended to "exorcise the death she had summoned up in her poem" (36), Alvarez builds up a portrait of Plath not only as a woman still consumed by guilt over her father's premature death (when she was nine), but above all as the artist too dangerously close to her material, with the result that she found herself living it out, becoming the image of her own art. For Alvarez, the creative urge is precariously close to death; the same poetic art that "bodied forth the death within her" (37) could and did also doom her.

The knowledge of actual or assumed suicide becomes part of the nexus in which a writer and her work are read. As in the case of Dazai critics, for whom Dazai's suicide catalyzes a process of literary mythmaking, here it is Alvarez who, in attempting post facto to undo the "myth" surrounding Sylvia Plath, reveals that *his* intentions may lie elsewhere. Alvarez dislikes viewing the poet as sacrificial victim and takes umbrage when "suicide becomes part of the story, the act which validates her poems, gives them their interest and proves her seriousness" (38). For him, Plath's suicide adds nothing to her poetry. She was not a "passive victim" (38) but a "creative" person for whom a tradition of suicide or "quasi-literary" forces may have played a role (40). He would like her to be seen as "simply . . . an enormously gifted poet whose death came carelessly, by mistake, and too soon" (38).

Alvarez's reluctance here to link Plath's suicide with her poetry, combined with his insistence that she did not intend to die, is surprising in the light of his avowed theme and intent; but, even more, it becomes embarrassingly and falsely self-effacing when he introduces his own attempted suicide in the epilogue. In order to maximize the impact of this linkage of "failed suicides," Alvarez must first traverse (through all of Western history) another suicidal opposition.

Early on, in his section on "Background," Alvarez draws a contrast between what he calls "frivolous" or pleasure-oriented suicide and "serious suicide," involving an "act of free choice," and labels the latter an index of "high civilization" (54). Building on this opposition, he goes on to contrast what he calls the mass or "racial suicide" of "pure, simple cultures" with the "less pure, more complex, culture[s of Rome and Greece], where death is accepted casually but beliefs are no longer simple and morality fluctuates, within limits, according to the individual" (56). The result is a "nobility of motive," whereby "the ancient Greeks took their lives only for the best possible reasons"—grief, honor, patriotism (57). The dismissal of "other" cultures here in favor of a tradition whose suicides have been dignified by (serious) literature and philosophy would seem to verge on ethnocentrism. Not only do these other cultures not benefit, it would seem, from sophisticated rationalizations, but the very rationality of collective suicide in what were often situations of forced genocide, is dismissed out of hand. If there is any doubt about the author's predilections, it should be put to rest by his affirmation that "the more sophisticated and rational a society becomes, . . . the more easily suicide is tolerated" (60).[30]

### *An Aristocracy of Suicides*

Alvarez throughout is concerned to develop an aristocratic line of suicides. To be sure, the development from the primitive to the civilized

cannot be entirely pure. Suicide must contain some vestige of the savage mind even in its modern guise. Yet the line of argument in his book is clear. It is the contrast with the rabble offering themselves for execution (even be it for money) and spectacle that makes the noble ideal shine. "Rational suicide was a kind of aristocratic corollary of vulgar blood lust" (64).

And through the ages it is invariably the sensitive writer-artist-intellectual who notices the difference, regardless of the prevailing official or mass ethos. Thus, in the Middle Ages, Alvarez perceives a Dante who, while upholding the medieval abhorrence of suicide as a Catholic, nevertheless reveals (to the Alvarez eye) a sympathy for the suicide who is also a sensitive sufferer. In the dark woods of the suicides, Dante's sympathy goes out to Piero, sinner and suicide, and victim of false imprisonment (138–144).

In the Renaissance, Alvarez notes a rationality, a coolness, and above all a focus on the individual as arbiter of his own fate. In Montaigne's words, "life dependeth on the will of others, death on ours" (quoted by Alvarez, 145). In Shakespeare, suicide is not condemned, and with Donne, "mee thinks I have the keyes of my prison in mine owne hand" (149). All in all, the emphasis is on an individualism that Alvarez declares to be qualitatively different from the Middle Ages, "a moment of considerable sophistication" (148).

Both Montaigne and Donne rationalize suicide in two ways that appeal to Alvarez. First they establish lists of great suicides;[31] second, they associate suicide with the "rational" customs of "other" societies (62). Furthermore, their arguments are couched in the scholastic tradition. Montaigne disparages trivial and frivolous suicides. "There are fantastic and irrational humors that have driven not only men but nations to do away with themselves. . . . Some moderation is necessary."[32] Like Alvarez, for Montaigne, mass suicides are by definition irrational: "What persuasion would not do in each man singly, it does in all, the ardor of association stealing away the individual judgment." In the end, he discovers on his utopian Isle de Cea a rational government that will allow the rational individual to take control and have a "happy end to a good life."[33]

With the rise of capitalism, this philosophical rationality pales next to the banality of poverty-induced suicide. It remains for the Romantics to revitalize the art of suicide by infusing it with creative energy. The resulting paradigm of the Romantic poet in turn requires a fusion of alienated genius with premature death. And with the help of Freud, this fusion, in the form of literary suicide, will be seen to take the form not just of a gesture of contempt against a dull, bourgeois world, but of an immortality conferred on modern readers via the experience of vicarious death (202–203).

When all is said and done, Alvarez's promotion of serious, "creative"

suicides is linked to his notion that artists suffer more than ordinary people. In this world—this modern unfeeling world—artists constitute the new aristocracy by virtue of their capacity to *feel* more intensely. And suicide becomes the litmus test of sensitivity. Alvarez's account of literary suicides, as history, as genealogy, lends "aura" to modern artists' suicides, placing them (and him) in a noble, exclusive heritage.

### *The Ultimate Aristocrat*

Perhaps Alvarez's ideal expression of what the literary suicide should be is provided by the example and writing of Cesare Pavese, the Italian writer, a suicide of the "kind [who] is born, not made" (121). Pavese writes that suicides do not reveal their suicidal urge or their suffering in their art, for that would be to purge themselves of that suffering (Pavese citation, 136). This may be why Alvarez seeks to dissociate Sylvia Plath's suicide from her work while still acknowledging it as an energizing force. As genuine suicides, both Pavese and Plath could be described as "aristocrats of death—God's graduate students acting out their theses to prove how limited were the alternatives. . . . Their act was, at its best, superb literary criticism" (Daniel Stern citation, 136).

Needless to say, Alvarez, the author and critic, is a candidate for the aristocracy. His revelation of his own "failed suicide" and his concomitant "rebirth" make clear why he insists on suicide as a distinguishing mark of this aristocracy. His book belies any intent to remain the aloof critic. Indeed, he calls his rapprochement of literature *and* suicide a "special perspective" leading him "to something altogether theoretical and tendentious" (137). Unlike Dazai's unabashed (and tongue-in-cheek) claim of libertinage in the line of Rimbaud and Baudelaire, Alvarez operates in an oblique, if not surreptitious, manner, to identify himself with the likes of Plath and Pavese as a kindred soul, in order then to cajole the reader into seeing him (Alvarez) as the implicit culmination of his own story of great suicides.

Alvarez's disingenuousness is everywhere evident. Indeed, it would appear to be a structural necessity for his enterprise. Having in the first line of his epilogue "admitted" that he is a "failed suicide," after alluding to it at least twice before (see note 28 to this chapter), and after chronicling a pantheon of superstar suicides, he states enigmatically: "It is a dismal confession to make, since nothing, really, would seem easier than to take your own life" (257). How is the reader to juxtapose this self-disparagement with the author's citation from Pavese, a suicide for whom Alvarez throughout demonstrates the profoundest respect? "The only way to escape from the abyss is to look at it, measure it, sound its depths and go down into it" (136). And how can the reader not connect Alvarez's

typing of Pavese as the "born suicide" with what he says about himself? Of Pavese, he writes:

> A suicide of this kind is born, not made. . . . He receives his reasons . . . when he is too young to cope with them or understand. . . . By the time he recognizes them more objectively they have become part of his sensibility, his way of seeing and his way of life. . . . His whole life is a gradual downward curve . . . on which he moves knowingly, unable and unwilling to stop himself. (121–122)

And of himself:

> I see now that I had been incubating this death for longer than I recognized at the time. . . . It [the childhood phrase "I wish I were dead"] was an echo from the past, joining me to my tempestuous childhood. . . . It seemed so obvious, an answer I had known for years and never allowed myself to acknowledge. (258)

> It was the one constant focus of my life, making everything else . . . [seem] merely a temporary halt in my descent through layer after layer of depression, like a lift stopping for a moment on the way down to the basement. At no point was there any question of getting off or of changing the direction of the journey. (257–258)

> I had entered the closed world of suicide and my life was being lived for me by forces I couldn't control. (259)

Clearly Alvarez sees himself as "a member of the club," as one with those he has identified as the genuine artists, the true geniuses. And yet, he is not *with* them because he has not in fact died. How does he resolve this troubling dilemma?

In an earlier chapter, on the Romantic Agony, he introduces, through the examples of Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, the notion of "symbolic suicide," or to use Rimbaud's term *littératuricide*, meaning essentially the destruction of one's creative powers symbolically as a "Romantic alternative for those fated not to die prematurely" (199). For Coleridge and Baudelaire, this meant decadence, opium, or growing old, whereas for Rimbaud it meant leaving poetry for a "normal" life as a trader. Without warning, Alvarez drops the notion of symbolic suicide here, saying only, somewhat enigmatically, "I shall return to this."[34] And he does, although without markers for the reader, in his penultimate chapter, "The Savage God," where his project of genealogical engineering reveals itself as what can only be, witting or not, an attempt to link himself to "the best and most ambitious work of this century" (236). This, as we shall see, he will do by inverting the apparent opposition between Ro-

mantic suicide and *littératuricide*, and claiming for the latter not only the survival but an enhancement of creative powers.

### *Modernizing the Language of Death*

Alvarez draws his impressionistic alignment of the modern artist and death by appealing to the bony bareness of statistical inference:

> In the twentieth century . . . the better the artist the more vulnerable [to suicide] he seems to be. . . . The casualty-rate among the gifted seems out of all proportion, as though the nature of the artistic undertaking itself and the demands it makes had altered radically. (229)

Alvarez makes a point of filling in the latest branches of his genealogical tree with a list of actual, would-be, and symbolic suicides: Rimbaud, Van Gogh, Strindberg, Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Brendan Behan, Artaud, Delmore Schwartz, Malcolm Lowry, John Berryman, Cesare Pavese, Paul Celan, Randall Jarrell, Sylvia Plath, Mayakovsky, Esenin, Tsvetayeva, Hemingway (228).

As reasons for this phenomenon, he speaks first of the "constant need to change, to innovate, to destroy the accepted styles" and the necessary accompaniment of technical innovation by "psychic exploration." In this enterprise, "the more serious artist," whose "gift is also the knack of sensing and expressing the strains of his time in advance of other people," reflects a "progressively more inward response to a progressively more intolerable sense of disaster." The result is that the artist shifts from "being a Romantic hero and liberator" to being "a victim, a scapegoat" (229–230).

But it is only the concomitant advent of modern technology and warfare, growing out of industrialism, that leads the artist to that "awareness of a ubiquitous, arbitrary death" which is "central to our experience of the twentieth century" (234). The enormity, prevalence, and randomness of death, symbolized by the experience of Hiroshima and the Nazi concentration camps, reduce all types of modern alienation to one of "psychic numbing." For the artist, this means that "under the energy, appetite, and constant diversity of the modern arts is this obdurate core of blankness and insentience which no amount of creative optimism and effort can wholly break down or remove" (233).

The result is expressed by Yeats's self-inclusive observation on twentieth-century artists ("After us, the Savage God"), from which Alvarez, in his earlier discussion of Dadaism, draws the title for his book.

> In a sense, the whole of twentieth-century art has been dedicated to the service of this earthbound Savage God who, like the rest of his kind, has

> thrived on blood-sacrifice. As with modern warfare, enormous sophistication of theory and techniques has gone into producing an art which is more extreme, more violent and, finally, more self-destructive than ever before. (216)

In the face of this Savage God, the poet for Alvarez had the obligation to "forge a language which [would] somehow validate absurd death, and to accept the existential risks involved in doing so," and this "double duty" was to be "the model for everything that was to follow." The supreme need for art was to find a language appropriate to this "dimension of unnatural, premature death," and that was to be "the language of mourning" or, in Kafka's words, it was to be "books . . . that make us feel as though we were on the verge of suicide" (quoted by Alvarez, 236). To write this way for the artist means to assume the role of scapegoat, "to test out his own death in his imagination" (236).

Alvarez proposes "two opposite ways into this dimension of death." One is what he calls "Totalitarian Art," by which he intends those artists who have confronted a dehumanizing and oppressive social system and been reduced to suicide, or to "silence, which amounts to the same thing" (238). The other is "Extremist Art," in which destruction is internalized in the individual artist, who "deliberately explores in himself that narrow, violent area between the viable and the impossible" (237).

As with most oppositions, a hierarchy can be discovered. Alvarez makes no secret of his preferences. It is Extremist Art that is superior and the argument is instructive, as is the association with suicide. Totalitarian Art, even at its best, as with the Russian poets of the early twentieth century or with the "Life-in-Death" world of Samuel Beckett, is a language of deprivation, "of facts and images . . . as depersonalized and deprived as the lives of the [Nazi] victims themselves" (244). Extremist Art, however, is defined as part of the heritage of the Romantic revolution. Indeed, it actually "completes the revolution which began with the first Romantics' insistence on the privacy of their subjective vision," and it does so by overcoming "that split between feeling and intelligence which has bedevilled decadent Romanticism from Shelley to Ginsberg" (245). In other words, it reasserts the value of the artist's intelligence by replacing the work in a "continual, cross-fertilizing relationship with the artist's life" (245). The link between art, creativity, death, and autobiography is made here in the strongest terms and given added legitimacy by reference to Camus.

> The existence of the work of art . . . fixes the energy, appetites, moods, and confusions of experience in the most lucid possible terms so as to create a temporary clearing of calm, and then moves on, or back, into autobiography. Camus first hinted at this in *The Myth of Sisyphus* when he suggested that

> a man's works "derive their definitive significance" only from his death: They receive their most obvious light from the very life of their author. At the moment of death, the succession of his works is but a collection of failures. But if those failures all have the same resonance, the creator has managed to repeat the image of his own condition, to make the air echo with the sterile secret he possesses. (246)

Extremist Art is for Alvarez an "existential art" combining the "intelligent" discipline of Classicism with the precarious inner urgency of the self—in sum, a fusion of Romanticism and Classicism suited to Alvarez's vision of the modern age. It is to be noted that this image of the artist is an exclusive one. Along with this quasi-Romantic intelligence ("provisional, dissatisfied, restless," 246), the artist must recognize and accept "the whole drab, boring labour of creativity" (245). It is precisely because of the great demands of artistic labor that "the confessional poets who follow Ginsberg seem so sad" (247). In sum, Alvarez's Extremist Art involves "an artistic intelligence working at full pitch to produce not settled classical harmonies but the tentative, flowing, continually improvised balance of life itself." This in turn places the Extremist artists, "committed to the truths of [their] inner life," at great risk, for they seek, unlike the Surrealists and more like "Eliot and the other grand-masters of the 1920s," to explore, with lucidity, precision, and vigilant expression, the depths of their unconscious at the point where it reflects the self-destructiveness of contemporary society (248).

### *Suicidal Survival and Genealogical Closure*

In the end, what Alvarez does in opposing Totalitarian and Extremist Art is to reassert the Romantic mode of autobiography. Throughout his story of suicide, he has privileged a notion of the feeling individual self against a mindless mass society, from his early oppositions of "frivolous" and "racial" as against "serious" and "individual" suicides—where the act of choice serves as an index of "high civilization" (54–55)—to his dichotomies of traditionalism/modernism and technology/art. His concept of totalitarianism is no less an image of the pacified (silenced) individual in the face of a cold, relentless social machine than is that of the Romantics, and his view of Extremism and its leading light Sylvia Plath (and by association A. Alvarez)—as, in paraphrase of Montaigne, an "extreme remedy to an extreme sickness" (citation, 245)—is an effort to resurrect and relegitimize the Romantic worldview in a postmodern form.

In order, however, to guarantee his own place in the pantheon, Alvarez works another ambiguous opposition to his needs. As we have suggested, his hidden project depends on the indeterminacy of suicide, and

more significantly, on the conflation of successful and failed suicides. When he announces, therefore, that Totalitarian Art "is as much an art of successful suicides as Extremist Art is that of the attempt" (243), we realize that he is actually privileging the life *and* work of the failed suicide over that of the successful one. And when, just prior to revealing his own failed suicide, he associates the "best modern artists" with "survival"[35] (with perhaps attenuated reference to Hiroshima), and caps his distinction between "genuinely advanced art" and "the fashionable crowd of pseudo-avantgardes" with a tribute to such poets as Robert Frost and Ezra Pound, his genealogy of suicide is finally revealed.

> An artist could live to be as old as Robert Frost or Ezra Pound and yet, in his work, still be a suicide of the imagination . . . by becoming . . . an imitation of death in which their audience can share. (251–252)

*The Savage God* is not so much a "study" as it is its author's "imitation of suicide," and as such it seeks to be an apotheosis of both author and lifework in which the reader is asked "to share." To our surprise, we realize that the failed or symbolic suicide need not play second fiddle to the Romantic prematurely dead. To the contrary, as Romantic survivor in the modern resurrected version of the *littératuricide*, it is the symbolic suicide who stands at the helm of art navigating a (classically) intelligent course through the ocean of modern absurdity. And one of the hidden components of this new type of what might be called "resurrected suicide" is an embedded, concealed opposition between critic and artist in which the traditional Romantic privileging of the latter is reversed. It is thus Alvarez as critic who survives, not just from youth into old age, but from poet/novelist to critic, and in asserting, as he does here, his version of suicide and his hierarchy of art, he emerges to claim control over the ultimate meaning of modern art.

He does this of course through language, and through the language of criticism directed at the lives, suicides, and art of others as well as himself. In sum, then, he is the quintessential autobiographical critic, reading his own past as a metaphor for literary suicide. Reading one's past, as Candace Lang points out, is not merely metaphorical: "Autobiography is 'literally' the analysis of one's past discoveries, of one's acts and utterances, insofar as they signify within a social and linguistic context."[36] Alvarez thus corresponds both to Roland Barthes's "positivist" critic, who "reads the literary text as the expression of a speaking subject who stands behind his work as a guaranty of its ultimate unity," and to Candace Lang's adaptation of this notion to the traditional (relabeled "positivist") autobiographer, "who sets himself the task of reading his past as one would a book, in an attempt to capture his true or essential self (the 'meaning' of his existence)."[37] That Alvarez reads not only his past but

also his own death in a book that purports to be a metacritical treatment of suicide suggests an effort not to undermine, as in the case of Dazai, but to prepare his own monumentalization. For Alvarez emerges as the *littératuricide* par excellence, reborn to normalcy yet claiming via his shared experience of suicide (and his "intelligent control" over the narrative of that experience) to be at the foremost point of those who have committed or written about suicide. As such, he may merit being dubbed neologically the first "metasuicide."

## Cross-Cultural Complicities

Alvarez's genealogy of Western aristocratic suicides culminating in the ultimate modern(ist) genial few, including Sylvia Plath and himself, inspires a perception of similitude—if not superiority—in the Japanese case. Where Alvarez thus manages, obliquely by way of his own failed suicide attempt, to emerge as the ultimate controller of meaning in the universe of modern absurdity, De Vos the social scientist works a parallel inversion when he posits an opposition between an "acute" and a "chronic" form of alienated Japanese intellectual. In order to appropriate privileged status for the Japanese writer, who is to convert his alienated marginality into social science value, De Vos must be concerned "not with the *acutely* alienated individual, but with the *chronically* alienated intellectual who in a sense is also an observer."[38]

Once again, as with Alvarez, the structure of a suicidal narrative in which the authenticity of the narrative is its own signified, forces the narrator—whether literary critic or social scientist—into contortions of a suspicious nature. We see not only inversions of value hierarchies but also the appropriation by the critics themselves of marginal status. Alvarez affiliates himself, through the interweaving of his own story of failed suicide, with the most creative artists of Western history; De Vos, while not so ambitious, makes a similar move to associate himself with the alienated intellectuals whom his narrative sets forth as those properly entitled to "a sense of greatness that is honored by the society" (487). In his preface, De Vos identifies himself as a "deviant social scientist" using an approach (psychological anthropology) that "is not accepted by a good number of colleagues" (1). And, as with the literary critic who turns the marginality of the suicidal writer into a claim of ultimate brilliance, so does De Vos argue that it is in fact the "psychological anthropologists [who] see human psychology in all its complexity at work everywhere." Analysis of De Vos's own language here reveals that his claim to superiority resides in his method's ability "to go beneath the surface," "to explain submerged channels," "to show the dark side," and so forth. If the language sounds familiar, it is probably because of De Vos's personal ex-

perience with psychoanalysis, which led him, as we have noted, to become "critical of social science generalizations that left out the intense reality of personal experience" because they "did not adequately consider the wellsprings of human motivation" (1).

In the foregoing, we have explored certain associations between suicide and literature in East and West as well as across the fields of sociology and literary criticism, offering analyses of several works of criticism in order to demonstrate the complicity of critic and writer in the mode of "suicidal narrative." The British poet-writer-critic A. Alvarez—and in the Japanese case, the socio-literary "Dazai industry"—seek, via a self-referential association with Romantic suicide or "failed suicide" as the sign of ultimate authenticity, to establish a genealogy of "genius." The aura of superiority results from an inversion of the sensitive writer-victim's "marginality" and results in the conferral of privileged status not only on the suicidal writer-critic but, by extension, on the literary establishment as a whole.

We have tried to show how the same polarity sketched in Chapter One is reinforced by the convergence of social science and literary depictions of suicide. A parallelism between sociological views of suicide and dichotomous cross-cultural traditions of suicide is noted as a structural component of modernization theory as well. When modernizationists look at Japan, for example, there is a tendency for suicide as "universal" to take on a "peculiarly 'Japanese' intensification."[39]

Of interest here is that the literary critic's discourse on suicide and creativity, although eschewing the "dry bones" approach of social science, inevitably ends up resorting to the same language in order to assert a hierarchical notion of superior modernism. Thus does Alvarez's text set forth a genealogy of brilliant suicides whose preeminent exemplars are such modernists as Sylvia Plath and himself, qualifying as a "failed suicide." In the Japanese context, critics identify a psychological "death wish operating throughout modern Japanese literature,"[40] while efforts to typologize suicide as a "literary theme" in the Japanese tradition become overtly sociological, juxtaposing "a relatively primitive level of individuation and a high degree of social integration."[41]

The predilection of social scientist and literary critic for associating modernization with an enhanced notion of inner subjectivity, with its obsessive aspect of alienation leading to suicide, bespeaks a form of intellectual elitism. This tendency is exemplified in particular by Alvarez's aristocracy of brilliant suicides, but it is perhaps not unrelated to a certain alienation felt by intellectuals toward workers, and explained as the "theory of *ressentiment*," that Fredric Jameson adapts from Nietzsche to his reading of nineteenth-century literature.[42] The view of suicide developed in these texts, as a social phenomenon whose "full reality" can be ex-

pressed only through the personal experience of suicidal writers and fully appreciated only by suicidal critics and psychoanalyzed social scientists, tends to elide or "marginalize" those other far more numerous and "mundane" suicides, whose human tragedies are inaccessible because "nameless" among the statistical indicators.

Implicit in any discourse on suicide is the perception of the self. The next chapter takes up the notion of the self as a key metaphorical construct in Japanese literary studies. Our perspective shifts from that of an elite eager to discover a "modern self" to a group of nihilistic writers (inspired both by their Western counterparts and by their Asian predecessors) whose writing and life-styles challenge the very elements of "self-righteousness" and "self-serving" opportunism of bourgeois selfhood. This group of nonconformist writers, known as the Buraiha (often translated as "decadents"), is seen as an instance of the literary establishment's need to create its mirror or "antihero" image. Such writers come to constitute the very condition (marginality) whereby the mainstream literary establishment, the *bundan*, defines itself relative to the social "whole." Dazai's image as the prototypical instance of such marginality is examined in the light of his association with the Buraiha phenomenon in the postwar period. The irony may be seen in the way in which establishment writers and critics portray their own role as counter to the respectable mainstreams of society (family, school, state) while maintaining a conspicuous "elitism" with regard to the mass public, whose presence and power of consumption both threaten and sustain them.

PART TWO

# Suicidal Autobiography

The suicide assists passively at the cancellation of his own history, his work, his memories, his whole inner life—in short, of everything that defines him as an individual.
—A. Alvarez, *The Savage God*

## *Chapter Three*

# NOVEL, GHOSTLY, AND NEGATIVE SELVES

THE STUDY of modern Japanese literature is a jumble of permutations in which certain key notions, derived from Western discourse, surface periodically. Perhaps the most prevalent of these constructs is that of the "self," a highly charged concept with currency in most social science fields as well as in intellectual history and literature. A study of suicide and narrative must consider the way in which writers and critics have conceived of the self, whose doing away with is the explicit intent of the suicide. In this chapter, we will see how much of the critical writing about Japanese literature, in complicity with its own projection of a modern romantic self, has tended to see Japanese literary production as a series of narrative quests for self-realization. That these quests are invariably described as failures calls attention to their status as concomitants of the modernization paradigm.

The quest for a modern "self" assumes the existence of a cohesive, self-contained "whole," to be grasped, conceived, understood, and, in the case of writing, described or articulated. In the cross-cultural context, the issue is complicated by the idea that the "West" (itself seen as a "whole," cohesive, and coherent tradition) has a prior and proprietary concept of the self (that is more organic, because indigenous) and that Japan must deal with an inferior—because imported—version, whose assimilation will never be complete.[1] To be sure, in dealing with such elusive abstractions, the critics may find themselves in an all-or-nothing situation. To speak of an inadequate conception of the self is in effect to proclaim its absence or to argue its nonexistence: "The self, that cornerstone of European humanism, is of course academically understood, but is nowhere felt as an everyday experience."[2]

An analogy suggests itself here with the process whereby religions construct metaphorical edifices over desired but absent transcendentals. Over this aporetic gap between the signifier of a modern self and its absent signified is erected a secular ideology of individualism, with religious overtones, whose end becomes the pursuit of an ever elusive "personal" freedom. The intensity with which this goal is pursued evokes parallels with medieval quests for holy symbols. Likewise, the insistence on the centrality of the I-novel to the modern Japanese literary tradition, combined with the disparagement of that genre's accomplishments ("The most fundamental problem of the I-novel . . . is the writers' lack of a

concept of the modern self"[3]), is suggestive of the admonitory nature of the priestly (critical) function.

The I-novel will be discussed in Chapter Four, but let us note here that the idea of a modern Japanese novel relies on the concept of a new ("novel") self that appears to exist already in the West but is somehow not programmed into the modern *shôsetsu*. In the light of this perception of inadequacy in Japan, the nation perhaps most prominently associated with suicide, it is ironic that for A. Alvarez it is the destruction of the self—suicide—that appears "so central" to modern writing. The reasonable assumption follows that suicide must involve the prior existence of a self. But how then can Japan, deficient in selfhood, flaunt its highly prominent association of suicide and writing?[4]

The very notion of self-destruction, moreover, should direct attention to several other critical and metacritical considerations. The first is the centrality of the concept of "self" to Japanese intellectual concerns since the Meiji period, involving an almost obsessive preoccupation with such ideological and philosophical terms as individualism, independence, autonomy, subjectivism, and their related psychological, social, and political implications. The second is the "imported" nature of this set of concepts, and the resulting East–West problematic that has structured Japanese literary studies. A third is the positing of a "Western self" and of its "absence" or "insufficiency" in Japan, such that, as we have suggested, the history of modern Japanese literature is often presented (narrated) as a "quest" for a modern self.

It is difficult not to see the suggestiveness of a possible variation of the term self-destruction into "self-deconstruction." Deconstruction, whether considered primarily as a philosophical or critical term, is above all seen as a "strategy" that deals with a discourse or a philosophy from "within" that same discourse. In Jonathan Culler's formulation, "to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise."[5] Suicidal narrative, as we propose using the term, involves the emergence of suicides in the "texts" of modern Japanese literature. As a rhetorical operation, this entails the simultaneous constituting and undermining of the key concept of selfhood or the premise of a Western/Japanese self. In this sense, the rhetorical concern with self-destruction can be seen to function as a deconstruction of the "self." Behind or within deconstruction's concern with discourse is an acute awareness of the power of language to repress, distort, or conceal what deconstruction itself would deny as any "real" or "true" relations of power.

The unstated proposition here of course is the Orientalist one that has

given rise to the notion that "other" peoples value human life less than we do and will hence more easily self-destruct than we will. But there is a more appealing interpretation offered by critic Mori Jōji, one that suggests a subversive view of suicidal narrative as practiced by Dazai and his co-decadents.[6] Put simply, it is the "lack" of a self that is itself deceptive. Like the visible erasures of the palimpsest or the hidden text of our own word processors, the Japanese self is as much present as its Occidental counterpart, but it appears (and disappears) in its proper form, as a ghost. Suicidal narration has as one of its by-products the enabling of an increased perception of these ghostly selves that inhabit the imagination and that are repeatedly projected in endless configurations, whose ultimate purpose is to trick the reader into believing that they represent genuine, durable subjects and selves.

## The Ghostly "I"

Mori's tantalizing view of modern Japanese masterpieces as "masked ghost tales" is based on his conviction that the best Japanese authors contain within their writing and their psyches an "antimodern 'ghost impulse' " (23). His use of the term "ghost" as a "tool of analysis" is designed to suggest the presence of what turns out to be three very familiar "factors" he finds "haunting" modern Japanese literature: the archetypal, the aesthetic, and the socio-psychological. The "liberation of Japanese ghosts," then, is but an eye-catching description in which literature is seen extratextually as "an attempt to encompass and control the alienation of modern man or to probe its causes and examine its nature" (27). Mori's efforts to fit his writers and works into his pantheon of ghosts is often strained, perhaps because he is so determined to relate his basic premise—that contemporary Japanese literature's "portrayal of man's sense of alienation" makes it "one of the most modern literatures in the world" (53)—to an atavistic antirational "paradox of Japanese life" ("down-to-earth realism and unearthly fantasy," 27) dating back fifteen centuries. Dazai Osamu is, not surprisingly, one of Mori's "ghosts," but rather than representing the demonic soul of an "unmistakably Japanese" (23) antimodern essence, Dazai may be said to stand for the repressed unconscious of a guilty literary establishment. Dazai "returns" by way of his texts to haunt/remind the latter not of its infidelity to Japan's past so much as of its sabotage and betrayal of the future. Dazai's "project" is figuratively an "undoing of the future," involving the accusation that criticism is already "dead" in its own lifetime.

Mori's notion of ghosts provides a useful way of considering the emergence of a "negative self" out of the quest for a modern "novel" self. In the process of creating a saintly aura of negativity around such writers as

Dazai, the critic plays the role of shaman mediating between "normal" and "aberrant" modes of behavior and between "positive" (functional) and "negative" (dysfunctional) personalities. The resulting criticism has a way of setting the picture (of society) straight by interpreting (rereading) text and author so that they "fit" or "make sense." The process involves, as argued in Chapter Two, a complicity between literary critic and social scientist. For example, Mori the critic identifies the disease (alienation), and social scientists (De Vos, Iga) provide the "cure," which is usually an explanation, in psychological or sociological terms, which reaffirms the essential health or "correctness" of modern society.

The tendency of much of this literature is thus to "blame the victims" or the "misfits" for their own circumstances. The parallel with the treatment of women, minorities, or outcasts is hardly accidental. The role of narrative in rationalizing male behavior and a double standard for women is well documented in such familar innocent tales as "Little Red Riding Hood," whose many different versions over time show the transformation of a peasant girl able to fend for herself into a bourgeois young lady whose own weakness and indiscretion leads to her undoing, and whose security ultimately depends on male prototypes of strength and good sense.[7] The critical and narrative process thus in general seeks to correct what it defines as "glitches" into its predetermined scheme.

Thus it is that suicide in the critical lexicon becomes double-edged, for it both locates a maladjustment of the individual and simultaneously, through narrative reconstruction, reconfirms the fundamental "correctness" of social reality, of which the critic as shaman is a part. Interpreted "correctly," social misfits and suicides allow us to believe that the big picture is all right, complete, and intact.

Because there may remain a residue of skepticism about this process, however, the dissonance of such voices as those of Dazai and his Buraiha counterparts become important. Their strategies of enhancing negativity, and in the case of Dazai, of renarrativizing suicide as *littératuricide*, challenge the big picture of harmony and threaten its neat borders and representations of closure. In their literary texts, they transform their self-images from positive to "negative selves" and give voice to those hidden "ghosts" that lurk beneath the too-smooth surface of Japanese modernity.

Dazai's approach, as will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters, is to project the image of a self already dead, "a living dead." His voice is throughout that of a postsuicide, able now properly to resist and deny the attempts to tell his story for him and to resurrect him into a monument of meaning. Thus does he write of a self that has "lost its quality of being human" and describe his initial autobiographical fiction as the product of someone who is "now not a person" but rather a "cadaver" whose sentences do not lend themselves to full understanding.[8]

Before examining Dazai's particular status as a writer of his "ghostly self," let us consider the idea of a negative self in its collective projection by the critics, in what may be termed the "Buraiha phenomenon." Indeed, Dazai Osamu, whose name may be said to serve as a lightning rod for this book, is associated by the critics with several other writers whose lives and texts are grouped together and viewed as an instance of such literary "self-negation" or "ghost-making." The phenomenon of these Buraiha writers, of whom Dazai was considered to be the paradigm, stands forth in Japanese literary history as a counterpart to French decadents or American beatniks—in sum, as a symbolic scapegoat for a would-be sacred and sacrosanct literary establishment, itself in turn the self-arrogated guardian of the social body's highest ideals.

## Negative Selves: The Buraiha Phenomenon

One of the curious results of the tendency to fit literary production and writers into a scheme of development has been that the Japanese literary landscape is studded with the names of those who do not fit neatly into the patterns, schools, movements, or labels that proliferate in Japanese literary studies. More often than not, such writers are defined in opposition to a posited "mainstream,"[9] and their creation, while recognized as brilliant and intense, is qualified as nihilistic or decadent. To be sure, these writers are also molded into categories deemed proper to them. They emerge as paradigms—and as their stature grows, eventually as monuments—of negativity. Sōseki, Akutagawa, Tanizaki—each in his own way is, to borrow Sibley's use of Valéry's phrase, an "intelligence rebelle" opposing the plastic banality of a revolutionary trend gone awry (the plight of Japanese naturalism), and each substitutes for the confessional intimacy of the autobiographical exposé a psychological or artistic intensity that makes the revelation of autobiographical "truth" pale in comparison. Still, Akutagawa and Tanizaki are classed with those who pursue art to its ultimate; they are the "dark romantics" of Japan,[10] who can still be fitted into the tradition of the obsessed artist, driven to despair by the relentless demands of a transcendental art.

It is with Dazai and a new perception of decadence and nihilism—that perception espoused and intoned not only by Dazai but by Sakaguchi Ango and Oda Sakunosuke as well, the three most prominent of the Buraiha phenomenon—that the features of a new negative paradigm are chiseled into Japanese literature's fresco as it reemerges in the light of the postwar period. It is of note that Dazai—a writer associated with the I-novel tradition and not an "antimainstream" writer—is the one to inject a note of intensity into the "mainstream" I-novel such that the negativity

inherent in that stolid tradition seems to emerge as a uniquely Japanese precipitate.

The new paradigm features an alienation more devastating than the proud loneliness and anguished egotism of a Sōseki or the "vague anxiety" motivating the aristocratic art of an Akutagawa. The anomic alienation of Dazai is seen as an authentically modern phenomenon, with only the most tenuous links—in spite of Dazai's own genealogical aspirations in the direction of nineteenth-century "libertines" like Baudelaire—to a Romantic tradition. Dazai, as we have seen, offers not only the literary critic but also the sociologist abundant grist for their modernization mill, providing an appealing case study for the latter and serving as the ultimate I-novelist—or in Miyoshi's terms, the "climax and conclusion of the I-novel tradition"—for the former. Moreover, his texts, seen in relation to the criticism that has grown around them, suggest that the particular configuration of self, society, and language projected by Dazai offers an irresistible mirror image, that of a "negative self," to the postwar critic and intellectual. The literary *bundan* of Japan, having romanticized its own history of marginalization and repressed the story of its own rise to power and prominence (reversing its own inside and outside), finds in Dazai the perfect "scapegoat" to distract itself and others from an embarrassing history of recuperation symbolized by *tenkō*. That history of guilt and responsibility, however, is still locked into the ideologeme of *ressentiment* (the subject of Chapter Eight). For the moment, however, we note that the *bundan* in the early postwar period marginalizes the Dazai type and characterizes its exemplars less as Valéry's "intelligences rebelles" than as Mori Jōji's "intellectual outlaws."[11] Implicitly, they posit an existing model of righteousness of which they themselves, as writers and critics, are the guardians.

## *Pharmakon* and Deathscript

Dazai's works are balm for some and poison for others.
All literature is like that to a certain extent;
Dazai's case is an extreme.
—Makoto Ueda, "Dazai Osamu"[15]

The notion of scapegoat (*pharmakos*), as Jacques Derrida explains,[12] is associated in Greek with two other terms, *pharmakon* (meaning simultaneously poison and remedy) and *pharmakeus* (prisoner or magician). The double meaning of *pharmakon* is certainly familiar to medicine and pharmacology, but it is noteworthy that Makoto Ueda should, without evident benefit of Derrida's close reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, emerge

with a similar analogy between *pharmakon* and writing,[13] and that this should be inspired—indeed, exemplified to "an extreme"—by Dazai.

Ueda is not the only critic of Dazai to find this analogy—with its implicit danger (and even threat of death)[14]—appropriate. Ozaki Shirō relates the metaphor directly to the *bundan* in his characterization of Dazai's writing as "a poison, in the sense of a preservative, for that world of the *bundan* which tends to rot so easily. . . . It doesn't require a lot of this type of poison—just a single person will do."[15] Like Socrates, Dazai is seen as a sorcerer (*pharmakeus*), seducing young, naive admirers with the "truth" about life and the "truth" of his own life. As such he is conveniently marginalized by the *bundan*, a symbolic surrogate in postwar times for the thought police of the prewar period, or the authorities of ancient Greece, for his "poisonous deathscript," that combination of life and writing whose validity is confirmed by the brutal honesty, even unto death, of the writer.

The analogy between poison and preservative here constitutes a useful extrapolation of the *pharmakon* into a more contemporary idiom and allows a further parallel between *pharmakon* and *pharmakos*. The *bundan*, in transforming Dazai into a paradigm of negativity, thus metaphorically uses a homeopathic treatment in order to "preserve" itself (as a pure, coherent inside). Its admixture of poison (the honesty of a Dazai) allows it to purify itself (to appropriate integrity) while eliminating the agent (the nihilistic writer). The latter, the dangerous element, disarmed of his poison, is then ritually sent out from the inside as the scapegoat bearing all of the body's or *bundan's* impurities (hypocrisy).

The postwar period and the *bundan-Buraiha* phenomenon may be considered in even more explicitly anthropological terms. Mary Douglas has stressed that societies tend to regard all transitional states as dangerous, because they are "undefinable."[16] One need only recall the general fear and abhorrence in most societies of hermaphrodites, transvestites, homosexuality, and schizophrenia, and the psychoanalytic revelations of the subconscious appeal of these same to suggest their importance for social relations. Initiation rites, which themselves come to invoke danger (including those of the college fraternity), invariably involve a transitional period during which the initiates are "outcast" from society in order to undergo a symbolic death and rebirth. For this period, initiates may actually be encouraged to commit criminal acts. "To behave anti-socially is the proper expression of their marginal condition." Above all, "to have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power."[17]

The appeal and power conferred by marginality and undecidability have been noted in connection with the Kabuki theater as well as with other early Japanese art forms, where actors, roles (especially that epit-

ome of undecidability, the *onnagata*), and place/space were rendered forbidden and hence desirable by their outcast status.[18] Dazai is on the one hand an archetypal instance of this process, while at the same time his "text" calls attention to its social and literary dimensions, or more specifically to the way in which the *bundan* and criticism "inscribe" his marginality in order not only to preserve itself but also to reassure itself of its own decidability. Mary Douglas has described the process in general terms: "It seems that if a person . . . is a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others."[19] Douglas applies her view to secular society, where she identifies the roles of social worker and psychiatrist as "judges" of social acceptability or abnormality. As Foucault has argued, too, our "modern" discourse on equality and tolerance conceals within it—and most of all in its technical (medical, psychological, sociological) terminology—more effective means of isolating, removing, and marginalizing persons whose "abnormality" was earlier either not seen as such or was dealt with in a ritual context.[20]

That such "marginalization" should be associated with transitional periods is particularly instructive in the case of Dazai and the immediate postwar period, which was felt to be the most dramatic and intense period of transformation in Japan's 2,000-year history. Involving as it did unparalleled destruction, chaos, and uncertainty about both past and future, it became for critics the ultimate transition, replete with the rhetorical symbolism of birth and death and a concomitant sense of undecidability and danger. To invoke Mary Douglas once again: "Danger lies in transitional states; simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable."[21] The sense of change, and hence danger, extended from the highest echelons of power to the interstices of the socioeconomic system and permeated the intimacies of everyday life, from food to sex to reading. The nation appeared to waver between social revolution and a backslide into fascism. It was in this period of national transition and marginality that the Buraiha writers and decadents came to be seen as "intellectual outlaws." The irony, of course, was that the *bundan* conferred upon them outcast status while recuperating their message as social prophylactic.

The term Buraiha refers to an unclearly defined group of writers in the immediate postwar period (1945–1948). These writers did not form a conscious literary movement in the sense of the naturalists, the sensualists, neosensualists, socialist realists—that is, groups with an explicit philosophy toward life or an advocated doctrine of literature or art. Although the individual writers involved did of course have and express their views on such matters, they did not see themselves as associated with, and in fact cannot even be said to have known, each other. The three major figures—Dazai, Sakaguchi Ango, and Oda Sakunosuke—met only once at a

round-table discussion at which they were so drunk that they were noticeably incoherent and barely recalled the experience afterwards.[22]

This incident is a good example of what did characterize the Buraiha—a life-style involving dissipation, debauchery, and irreverence—and a corresponding image that lent unity to their otherwise very distinct lives and literary production. It is thus more appropriate to see Buraiha as a coalescence of life and literary styles appearing to certain critics and sectors of public opinion as the embodiment of a mood of gloom and despair beneath the façade of buoyant optimism and progress that had so quickly taken hold after the war and defeat. The fact that these writers died premature deaths (by suicide, or from the effects of alcohol and drug addiction) reinforced and crystallized the image they projected. At the same time, their disappearance from the scene or in some cases a dramatic change of tone and style (such that the label Buraiha no longer seemed appropriate) coincided strikingly with the upturn in Japan's material condition, especially from 1948 on. In retrospect, then, the Buraiha is characterized by the literary establishment as an ephemeral but intense "spiritual" phenomenon, cathartic in nature, said by one critic to be like a hurricane, "shocking the Japanese spirit and destroying itself in the process."[23]

Another term used to refer to certain Buraiha writers was *Shingesakuha*, "new fiction" movement, harking back to the genre of the Tokugawa period (*gesaku bungaku*) that had sought to make respectable a lighter literary genre in an atmosphere dominated by weighty Confucian didactic novels. The term Shingesakuha was devised by Oda Sakunosuke to refer more positively to writers like himself in the postwar period who felt they were developing a literature that was fresh and vital in opposition to the "mainstream" literary movements. Thus the Shingesakuha level would presumably include more writers than the Buraiha under the bohemian or beatnik label.

The major Buraiha writers were Dazai Osamu, Sakaguchi Ango, and Oda Sakunosuke. If the Shingesakuha label is attached, one may also include Itō Sei, Ishikawa Jun, and Takami Jun. Other writers (among the many) that have been included are Dan Kazuo, who knew and drank with Ango and Dazai, and Tanaka Hidemitsu, who was a protégé of Dazai's and ensured his association with the label by committing suicide at Dazai's grave.

The works or "worlds" of Buraiha writers are peopled with marginals, outcasts, outlaws, dropouts, and failures: the traditionally weak or oppressed, from women and children to sick, crippled, or the mentally deficient. The actions and thoughts of these people are contrasted, explicitly or implicitly, with another "world" or reality, that of the "normal," healthy, sane, sound, strong, and successful. There is no effort in these

works to forge links with a militant, rising working class. Indeed, the worlds depicted by Buraiha writers are devoid of such presences altogether: there is no apparent class struggle. The early efforts of Dazai to write socialist realism only heightened his sense of alienation from the most populous sector of his society. And by the postwar period, the revolutionary alternative in his writing had taken on the overtones of what Jameson describes as the "theory of *ressentiment*" (see Chapter Eight). Dazai, Sakaguchi, and others were "outcasts" by choice, not necessity, and as such felt equally alienated from those traditionally deprived of power.

If their actions and behavior cannot be termed revolutionary, they can and are considered rebellious. Their revolt is against a tyranny of the most insidious sort, of a kind that can undermine even initially successful political and economic revolutions: cultural tyranny in the broadest sense, at the most basic elemental levels, in the family and at school. It is a revolt against the overwhelming pressure to conform inculcated through social institutions and that can be overcome only through radical transformation. It is not surprising, then, that the "possible" alternatives Buraiha writers envisage are utopic, for they themselves were able to experience temporary respite from the oppression of conformity only through the lives of other marginals who were "free" from that tyranny.

> I'm a libertine (*buraiha*). I'd just as soon rebel against this [democratic] euphoria, join the conservatives, and be the first to be led to the guillotine.[24]

It is against this postwar mood of a literary "renaissance" and general euphoria that Dazai's epistolary credo signals a series of cold water blasts. In March 1946, Dazai goes public with his manifesto: "I'm a libertine (*buraiha*). I rebel against constraints. I jeer at the opportunists."[25]

There are numerous levels of irony in Dazai's stance and rhetoric, not the least of which is his libertarian revolt against the very advocates of democracy of his time. We shall have occasion to examine these anomalies subsequently, but for the moment let us focus on Dazai's use of this term *buraiha* to which he gives a French pronunciation (*libertin*) and a contemporary Japanese significance. Dazai's original text ("Response to a Response") of March 1946 had used only the Chinese-derived term *buraiha*. It is suggested by critics that Dazai may have been using this neologism as a translation of the French *libertin*. In the subsequent republication of the piece in a collection of Dazai's essays in March 1948, a phoneticized *katakana* transcription of the French "libertin" (*riberutan*) was added. That Dazai had in mind some version of the free-thinking dissoluteness associated with the term in the West is evidenced by a discussion of free thought (*jiyū shisō*) contained in his "Pandora's Box" (*Pan-*

*dora no hako*, 1945) in which parallels are drawn between seventeenth-century free thought in Europe and postwar Japan.[26]

Regardless of Dazai's motivation in using the term *buraiha*, it is clear that his intent was not to designate a literary movement, trend, or style. The term Buraiha was only subsequently used by journalists and critics to refer to writers such as Dazai, Sakaguchi, and Oda. In time it came to have enough legitimacy to be included in the encyclopedic compendiums the Japanese literary establishment regularly produces. One of the more recent of these is devoted to the Buraiha phenomenon itself. Titled "A Dictionary of Buraiha Literature," it describes the term *buraiha* as a *bundan yōgo*, which translates as "literary term" but which literally means a "term used in literary circles (*bundan*).[27] As has been noted, the *bundan* or literary world of Japan is considered a cohesive entity, an "establishment" determining not only what and who shall be published but also what should be said about writers and works and how (in what *terms*) it may be expressed. The entry of Buraiha into the pantheon of *bundan* writers is itself a posthumous accolade of the kind foreseen by Dazai as an ironic testimonial to the failure of revolt intended by his use of the term in the first place.

## Intellectual Outlaws

One of the key components of discussion about Japan in the twentieth century has been an East–West polarity. Whether in the form of democratic, modernizationist, nativist, or indeed Marxist, discourse, there is a tendency to essentialize a Japanese as against a Western Other. This tendency, it may be argued, is so deep-seated, so reinforced by the institutional configurations of twentieth-century Japan (including its relation with the United States) that it has come to be seen as "the way the world really is." It is a ground that subsumes nationalists and Marxists, men and women, workers and capitalists, and the prewar and postwar periods. It veils conflicts and oppositions by positing a harmony of shared linkages, of which the Japanese language is by no means the least.

What Foucault calls the discursive formation becomes critical here.

> Different oeuvres, dispersed books, the whole mass of texts that belong to a single discursive formation—and so many authors who know and do not know one another, criticize one another, invalidate one another, pillage one another, meet without knowing it and obstinately intersect their unique discourses in a web of which they are not the masters, of which they cannot see the whole. . . .[28]

Not only does this concept challenge the notion of a coherent disciplinary discourse (literary criticism) dealing with an essence (literature); it is also

to be seen as a "conglomerate of power," as well as a repressive force linking "institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms" (i.e., the politics of everyday life) that make it appear as if "objects" of discourse locate themselves in a natural manner in their proper place. Within the rules of the discursive formation, rationality and insanity, poetry and prose, and so forth, are distinguished. What allows these distinctions to be made and naturalized are the rules of discourse that give them legitimacy.

To illustrate this, Foucault distinguishes between "speaking the truth" and "being in the truth": "It is always possible one could *speak the truth* in a void; one would only be *in the true*, however, if one obeyed the rules of some discursive 'policy' which would have to be reactivated every time one spoke" (i.e., by accepting the rules of that area of truth for one's historical epoch). Not to do so or to buck the system is to risk being on the "outside" (an outcast) and to become voiceless (no access to the power of the discourse, the legitimation). There are those who have no choice in the matter (the poor, the criminal, the marginal), and there are those (like Dazai) who choose not to conform. Dazai and his kind, the Buraiha, are characterized for a time as rebels, as subversives of the literary power structure, the *bundan*, whose members, through their credentials, derive the power to speak the "truth" of literary criticism in Japan, to determine what passes as literature, to act as the arbiters of literary taste. Part of their power, moreover, derives from the interlocking nexus the *bundan* shares with other institutions (publishing, university, government, media, and education).

The writer as rebel distinguishes himself or herself by a resistant self-consciousness aware of itself and its problematic relation to the *bundan* and society. The Buraiha and their texts seek to subvert the totalizing tendency implicit in Foucault's description. There is an open-ended quality to these writers, taken as a socio-literary configuration, that highlights its dispersed and temporal nature. For example, the label Buraiha (which Dazai had used to refer to himself as a "libertine") is itself a journalistic transposition of a term designed to link a number of diverse writers and life-styles. Even descriptions of Buraiha that attempt to confer symbolic stability upon the phenomenon suggest, by their very language, the tenuous nature of the enterprise:

> Buraiha writers were the genuine heroes of turbulent postwar Japan; they were its symbol, even the answer to its prayers. . . . They appeared with the sudden violence of a tornado, violently shaking the depths of the Japanese soul, only to then spend itself of its intensity, dwindling, dissipating in a frenzy and finally wafting away like a gust of wind.[29]

Moreover, the contextual nature of the Buraiha phenomenon highlights the elusive relation between literature and history, as well as between the individual subject and consciousness. Depicted as appearing and departing in an explosive, intense manner, the Buraiha were portrayed as having a dramatic impact on postwar consciousness. The critical process of naturalization and monumentalization efficiently turned Buraiha writers into larger-than-life heroes, saints of negativity for an entire people that felt itself to be marginal and whose own context was highly contingent. Ironically, the Buraiha association with revolt and outcast status becomes the condition of its recuperation. Japan's new postwar ideology of bourgeois democracy and individual freedom could not look back to a dramatic resistance with antifacist heroes. Leftist and *tenkō* writers were too metaphysical or too doctrinaire perhaps to capture the imagination of a young and confused public. In sum, the Buraiha appeared more easily recuperable by a literary establishment very much in tune with the dominant ideology. It was convenient for critics to fit the Buraiha writers into the line of past and present decadents, both Japanese and foreign, to provide them with their own lineage, tradition, and genre, that of *burai bungaku*, and finally to depict them as perhaps "marginal" but ultimately nonsubversive social types, as prodigal children, misdirected but well-meaning.

## Perversity Personified: Sincere Decadence

Consider, then, that note of Buraiha authenticity against its immediate postwar background. For it was not long after the dropping of two atomic bombs over major metropolitan areas of Japan, not long after the benumbing destruction of the national infrastructures by aerial firebombing accompanied by staggering losses of human life, not long after the installation of a foreign military occupying power for the first time in Japan's long history, not long after the liberation of the Japanese people from the oppressive ideology of militarism and from the mystical and mystifying emperor system (a liberation symbolically enacted by the first-time-ever publicly heard shrill imperial voice relieving itself of its divinity), and not long after long-silenced voices began to denounce oppressive institutions, their agents, and their values, that the strident assertions on the part of these several grown men not entirely unfamiliar to the Japanese public were heard. All writers of ambiguous political persuasion, each shocked their public with emotional literary outbursts. Dazai, an unlikely candidate for invitation to tea at the Imperial Palace, had one of his fictional characters proclaim "Long Live the Emperor" (*tennō heika banzai*),[30] a chant synonymous to the ears of occupying Americans with "Heil Hitler"; meanwhile, Sakaguchi Ango pointed to the spectacle of mission-

aborted kamikaze pilots pushing wares in a burgeoning black market and declared that it had "always been this way." Against the mood of hope and optimism, against the belief that the worst was over and that change had come, and even against the new-found freedom of personal life-style, Dazai, Sakaguchi, and Oda Sakunosuke adopted the most perverse positions possible. In one piece, whose title "Hair" (November 1945) should evoke a certain mood/mode of the 1960s in the United States, Oda vented his irritation: "The more I see the way everyone's so eager to grow his hair long now, the more disgusted I get. And what disgusts me even more is that it's the same ones who had to be the first to get crew cuts [during the war] that are now the first to let their hair grow."[31]

In their personal life-styles, then, as well as in their writings, they used perversity as a sword against hypocrisy. Perversity in a conformist society could only resonate with a tone of sincerity behind the irony and self-derision.

Of particular relevance was the Buraiha "poison," as contained in the rhetorical, antinarrative quality of their writing (and living). On the one hand, Dazai and Sakaguchi were the deconstructors par excellence of the national myth of discontinuity. Their often bitter irony and acidic attacks were directed not only at the visible institutional power structure (family, school, and government) but at the subtle mechanisms of control, at the very processes by which people internalized the dominant ideologies. Sakaguchi attacked not only the emperor system and the myth of Japanese divinity, but the mind control and self-censorship that had become so ingrained in people's everyday lives. His theme of decadence (*daraku*) was above all a liberating concept that was designed to negate the controlling dichotomies of sacred/profane, divine/human, courage/cowardice, continuity/discontinuity, eternity/present. In his "On Decadence" (*Darakuron*, 1946) he humanized both returned kamikaze pilots (by justifying their transformation into black marketeers) and chaste war widows (by portraying them as women capable of romantic desire). He recognized the historicity (as opposed to the divine origin) of the emperor system and of the warrior ethic *bushidō* by labeling them Machiavellian devices. In other essays, he sought to subvert the very notion of culture by privileging the utilitarian aspects of modern life, such as elevators and public transport, over traditional Japanese esthetics: "Were all the temples of Kyoto and all the Buddhist statues in Nara to burn down, we wouldn't be as inconvenienced as we would by a streetcar stoppage."[32]

Dazai, too, was preoccupied with the hollowness of myth and language. Both writers sought to subvert what they saw as the repressive power of the Japanese language in everyday life. What they saw happening around them in the frenzy of the postwar period was something that no one wanted to admit: that, as Sakaguchi put it, only the surface of

things had changed.[33] Beneath the slogans of democracy and individual freedom was a scandal: the ease and superficiality with which even the most ardent supporters of the war effort made the switch belied a continuity and an inertia. The fact was, as Sakaguchi noted, that people continued to bow like automatons as they rode by the sacred Yasukuni Shrine.[34] Moreover, if they continued to behave irrationally, it was because they had internalized certain responses. And the left, the Communist Party, and the *bundan* were as guilty as the militarists of essentializing not only Japanese history and culture but literature and art as well.

It was also perhaps Sakaguchi's concept of "decadence" that elaborated most succinctly why the Japanese people should be skeptical of the postwar myth of rebirth. Decadence was a humanizing, demystifying concept whereby not only was it human to err, but wherefore it became evident that there was no difference between the past and the present. Against the narrative of the postwar episteme, calling for a deviation, a punishment, and salvation through a "divinely" aided rebirth, Sakaguchi's "decadence" argued that the deceptive changes of the postwar period concealed a very banal manipulation of simple ordinary people by their rulers. Moreover, governmental efforts to make men into immortal heroes, and to render widows eternally chaste, were equivalent to those that had made emperors divine and the Japanese nation into paradise. All had been narratives motivated by partial, partisan interests, whereas genuine history and individual consciousness remained fragmented and resisted being synthesized into symbolic entities.

Ironically, it was the very integrity of the "voices" of Sakaguchi and Dazai that allowed them to be cast as heroes themselves, as symbols of an authenticity with which to counter the hypocrisy of opportunists switching allegiances and ideologies with alacrity. It was also ironic that this very superficiality of human commitment was precisely what Sakaguchi held up as evidence of Japanese "decadence" throughout its history. The advocates of decadence as a liberation from the perils of symbolism, then, were made into apostles of their own statements and as such erected into symbols, albeit countersymbols, of the kind they decried.

It has been suggested that the historical significance of Buraiha writings as a "transitional literature," a precursor to contemporary literature of the 1960s on, may have been neglected due to the shock of their original "furious intensity."[35] Such judgments tend to be seen by admirers of the Buraiha as a begrudging recognition bestowed by a guilty literary establishment. To Okuno Takeo, the Buraiha are authentic writers of revolt whose defiance of hypocrisy and authority point accusingly at the contemporary literary scene.[36] He characterizes them as fierce critics of

the political opportunism of the *bundan*, suggesting that the "neglect" of the literary world to accord the Buraiha its "proper place" in literary history may have been vindictive. For Okuno, the frenzied writing of the Buraiha represents a genuine and valid effort to resist the reality of a defeated and physically ruined Japan by realizing a truly new literature. Okuno goes further and accuses the literary establishment of distorting the importance of the Buraiha writers by trying to cast them as examples of "life-drama" (*seikatsu engi*) by which presumably their writing becomes significant not because of any inherent literary quality, but because of the life-styles of the writers (the intimation being that even the turbulence of their lives may be deliberately engineered). Okuno defends the Buraiha as literary innovators and dismisses the idea that there could have been any pretense, conscious or unconscious, in the lives of these writers, who were nothing if not sincere to themselves and the Japanese reality, a quality Okuno finds more necessary than ever but nowhere to be found in contemporary literature in Japan.

It is perhaps critics like Okuno, however, who, in their passionate identification with Dazai and Buraiha, end up transforming them from marginal outlaw into romantic hero, and in so doing, effect a closure to their story that the postwar history of Japan would appear to require. According to Okuno, writing retrospectively in 1968,

> Today when conditions confirm the rightness of Buraiha's pessimistic realism, people should . . . demand a *buraiha*-type literature of revolt. The generation of those of us who were deeply influenced by Dazai, Sakaguchi, and their kind, are now feeling a resurgence of the profound affection we felt for them. Even younger people in these times, reading Dazai for the first time, reveal a similar strong feeling. But of course there are no more like him.[37]

There is a nostalgia and a hero-worshipping tendency in Okuno that would appear to deny his own *bundan* role in writing Japanese literary history. In an ironic way, he typifies the *bundan*'s tendency to see itself as victim, as outcast, in spite of the actual power that has accrued to it. As the maker of its own history, after all, the *bundan* can turn its own rejects, or scapegoats, into mirror images of itself; its very position of discursive power allows it to transform its "autobiography," as told through "literary history," into a tale of the romantic creative hero. As suggested earlier, however, the wielder of power must have credentials, which are obtained through transitional states of marginality and the experience of danger. Through its negative heros like Dazai, the *bundan* vicariously relives that marginal outcast status of its infancy and youth. The *bundan*, no longer the narrow, self-centered elite of its Meiji youth, has of course become a journalistic, commercial, mass enterprise concerned with prestige and profit. Moreover, this postwar success story

may mask a guilt for abandoning its early leftist democratic ideals and its collective sense of *tenkō*. For whatever the reason, the Buraiha phenomenon allows the *bundan* to simulate or mime its own postwar renaissance and to accrue to itself the integrity and purity so essential to its viability.

## De-Estheticizing the Political

If the nature of fascist culture is to promote identification; to popularize and romanticize heroes; to collectivize the individual and individualize the collective; to eradicate or marginalize difference, imperfection, and deviation; to collapse time and space—in short, in Walter Benjamin's words, to "esthetize the political"[38]—then the response to this can only be to highlight difference, create distance, and undermine harmony. Buraiha writers seek to do precisely this by converting history, legends, and autobiographical data into vehicles of derision and creating characters of antiheroic and antiutopian proportions. And yet, as we have seen, in this same antiutopian thrust of Dazai's literature is to be found a driving utopian impulse. It is the imaginative world of difference, of discontinuous and nonlinear time, in which each moment hews its own truth, in which the individual speaks of new truth at every moment, and in which each of these truths is no less valid than the next. These utopian impulses are cast in a literary discourse that is different from the new wave of intellectual imports of neosensation writing or Joycean experimentation. Where writers like Itō Sei and Ishikawa Jun promote the development of a modern Japanese high culture patterned on a Western avant garde, and while traditionalists like Nagai Kafū gravitate toward a nostalgic, romanticized popular Japanese past and essence, Dazai and the Buraiha undercut the very opposition between high and low culture that structures the public mind. Their project remains unchanged from the prewar period. What does change is the relation of the high–low components. Under the aegis of the American Occupation, the sophisticated Western-oriented intelligentsia of the prewar period assumes a dominant position. A pluralist frenzy of literary production allows for the hegemony of a writing in which liberation from restraint (sexual, political, psychological) becomes the surface utopian mode. Popularization of culture seems to have taken place, but in a modern, humanist, pluralist vein. To be sure, the state apparatuses are there, but they are being controlled by the occupier to benefit the interests of the people. "Democracy" is the word.

And into this warm frenzy enters the shock effect of Sakaguchi's treatise on "decadence," with its rationalization of the emperor system, and Dazai's *The Setting Sun* and his cry of "Long Live the Emperor." Iconoclasts, but even more than that, they attempt, once again, to counter the crescendo of culture as it builds into a new hegemony, this time of modern

liberal intellectual stripe. Dazai and Sakaguchi construct (or more properly deconstruct) an empire of free-floating signs. Signifiers are liberated from their signifieds. For Dazai and Sakaguchi, the utopia will have to be sought at the limits of Japan as a literary and linguistic phenomenon. The veil of romantic nostalgia having been brutally ripped off by military defeat and economic ruin, the permeation of modern democratic institutions, legislation, and values begun seventy-five years before proceeds apace, but with renewed vigor and unflagging optimism. Instead of careful, critical, and collective organization, there is passive acceptance of rhetoric and the building of an inertia to accompany a high culture of modernism, distinguished by its new face lift of democratic humanism. To Dazai, the ideal of difference is further away than ever, and the danger of cultural fascism even more life-threatening than under the military.

What was there in the everyday reality of postwar Japan that lent such a sense of desperation to Dazai's activities? That he should have intensified his life-style and writing as he did, although it was only a matter of degree, had undoubtedly to do with a perception of an even greater gap between rhetoric and reality in the postwar period, yet it also had to do with his own position within the literary establishment. Suddenly he was "recognized," and not only as an artist but as a special person in touch with the truth of Japan. The irony was that this message was being heard by a select group of people, mostly young college students, a demanding audience for whom proof of sincerity and authenticity was required.

If the message was the hypocrisy of this new liberal establishment and the high culture ruling it, how could Dazai maintain his integrity while still being part of it? The answer seemed to lie in demonstrating the sincerity of the message by acting it out, a course that led irrevocably to his own self-destruction. But it also involved the deliberate construction of a personality out of the fragments of Dazai's memories and resulted in a type of autobiographical fiction that set in relief the dissonance within that created subjectivity. In so doing, Dazai became both a prototype and a subverter of the Japanese I-novel.

*Chapter Four*

# THE LAST OF THE I-NOVELISTS

## Specifically Autobiographical

Candace Lang argues forcefully that both the centrality of autobiography to literary criticism today and the critical treatment of autobiography are very much a result of the persistence of Romanticism as the dominant mode of Anglo-American and French (and, we might add, Japanese) criticism.[1] Lang spells out the characteristics of European Romanticism as they apply to autobiography and the concomitant perception of the self; she indicates how these condition contemporary autobiographical studies to the exclusion (or "exemplary recuperation") of vital questions raised by poststructuralists (including a structural similarity between the critical act and the autobiographical act); and she demonstrates how these issues are treated by such genuinely critical autobiographers as Henri Beyle and Roland Barthes. In order to elucidate a pertinent linkage between autobiography and suicide, let us briefly consider the Romantic notions of self, human nature, and art.

Lang outlines five points that she finds reflective of "the same constellation of values and beliefs that informed European Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

1. Each individual possesses a unified, unique, ineffable self.
2. The authentic self, being pre-cultural, is in constant danger of alienation through commerce with the other . . . [which] presupposes the original integrity of the romantic subject. . . .
3. There is an originary universal human nature, making possible human communication among individuals at a pre-cultural level, e.g., through sentiment.
4. Poetry and art . . . alone express the inexpressive, effecting a fusion of form and content, idea and matter, and so on.
5. The self [as] a pre-linguistic entity . . . may dissimulate itself *behind* linguistic personae. (4)

Lang's deconstructive approach to autobiography makes no mention of suicide. And yet, given her privileging of a criticism that might "ponder the consequences of a total rejection of that [romantic] notion of the subject" and that would see the autobiographical text as an inevitable "reflection on its own conditions of possibility," what more problematic vi-

sion of the self—and, consequently what more appropriate narrative generator—could there be than the perception of one's self-destruction? It is hardly an unlikely coincidence that the Romantic preoccupation with the self is accompanied by an obsession with death and a glorification of suicide, and yet, for all of deconstruction's affinity with Romantic writers, there seems to be little interest in the idea of suicide as conceivably the ultimate deconstructive act. If, as Lang elaborates in her fifth point above, the creation of a linguistic persona—ostensibly to protect the autonomous, pure, prelinguistic self—is in fact the romantic irony of *dédoublement* (whereby the self is constituted, fictitiously, as an object of knowledge), then suicide by romantic writers and in their writing may be the irony that undercuts and reveals the ultimate impossibility of *dédoublement*.[2] Lang extends her analysis to show how traditional literary criticism and classical autobiography are united in a "symbiotic relationship" in their presupposition of exclusive metalanguages—critical discourse for the former and literary language ("poetic" autobiography) for the latter (10–11). We have seen how this relationship betrays itself in the case of a critical discourse on suicide by A. Alvarez, a writer who is himself a failed suicide.

In considering suicide as a narrative construct, let us introduce four issues—intention, confession, conversion, and creativity—that can be associated most pertinently with autobiography and literary suicide. Louis A. Renza, in an article discussed by Candice Lang, distinguishes autobiographical from novelistic production in terms of intention.[3] Whereas the novel focuses on a present still in process, autobiography for Renza seeks to capture, via narrative, a self-referential past. To the extent, therefore, that autobiography *intends* the past, it is also inextricably linked to that past and "precludes the possibility that the writer can deliberately adopt a persona behind which he conceals references to his own life." Like history, which purports to recapture the "truth" of the past, autobiography is suspect as a result of its process, which is writing or language. It becomes suspect, moreover, when the undecidability of that intention is revealed. The distinction between novelistic and autobiographical production thus breaks down at the point where the "intended past" of autobiography is revealed to be a consciousness "trained on its own present."

Suicide involves the same ambiguity as autobiography in that it can only be conceived of as an intentional act. Even the discussion of self-destruction in animals necessarily involves a teleological attribution (e.g., species survival or evolutionary transformation). To say that consciousness does not play a role here is to recognize that human consciousness may in fact be playing a deceptive and self-deceptive role. The line be-

tween deliberate and unconscious intention can be drawn only by retrospective or novelistic (i.e., linguistic) production.

Earlier we noted the problem of the undecidability of intention in relation to suicide and its similarity to the project of textual interpretation. The very tension between the components of that opposition, to be or not to be, to write or not to write, is nevertheless what generates a text. Moreover, the autobiography, by its very nature, is analogous to the suicide's demonstration of intent to die. For the telling of one's life is tantamount to inviting an ending. Put differently, the author can conceive of the narrative only by looking at it from a projected Archimedean point outside the body or beyond the life, thus positing the possibility of a language beyond, or a metalanguage. Death as a narrative marker leads not only beyond and outside the body but also inward to the ultimate sources of life. Death in Japan is intimately associated with writing, as the tradition of the "death poem" suggests. Moreover, seppuku as part of that tradition merges the metaphors of pen or brush and sword in a powerful way by equating the shedding of one's blood with pure sincerity (*makoto*). In disemboweling himself, the warrior reveals the purity of his intentions, the revelation symbolized in graphic representation in the most dramatic case by literally placing one's entrails outside of one's body.[4]

This concrete metaphor for intending to lay "bare one's soul" or innermost thoughts leads to the second aspect of autobiography, that of confession. The story, if it is to be worth the telling, must involve a disjunction in the past between an actual and an ideal form of behavior. The autobiography proposes to set forth this incongruence just as the suicide, in his or her intention, is also cognizant of discrepancy and proposes to atone for it, expiate it, or exorcise it, by self-destruction. Confession calls attention to what is perhaps the unstated or understated goal of all writing—to posit the possibility of change. In the case of autobiography and suicide, clearly the focus of change is the self, and the nature of the change is radical. In seeking to reveal (eliminate) a disjunction between a reality and an ideal, or between an inner and outer world, the individual claims to have undergone a conversion, the result of which is presumably a rebirth in a world of inner/outer harmony. The reported sense of peace with oneself that accompanies imminent death in the case of suicide is a reflection of this, as is the resolution of the inevitable crisis or turning point that the autobiographer will have incorporated within the text.[5]

Finally, in the modern perception of both suicide and autobiography, there is an attribution of creativity. The will to generate a text of one's life, like the will to take one's life, is seen to involve a magical power available only to a select number. Thus, as the case of Alvarez demon-

strates, it may not be surprising that the artist-intellectual is seen as the epitome of modern suicide.

## An I for An I

> It is somewhat ironic, surely, that the autobiographic retelling of the author's very personal life should grow out of a myth of the collectivized self, and not one of celebrating individual personality.
> —Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*

The history of modern Japanese literature incorporates many of the same assumptions and conclusions of modernization theory as applied to Japanese modern history in general. In particular, it emphasizes that ideological imperative of democratic modernization, the concept of individualism, defined by one critic as the "idea that the existence, the energy, and the morality of the individual are valuable in their own right and worthy of cultural attention and respect."[6] And as with all abstract ideas, it projects an ostensibly more concrete or "real" representation, which is in fact a metaphorical construct of a suspicious nature: the "self." This construct, which becomes an elusive object of pursuit for an intellectual elite, simultaneously acts as a criterion for judging the "progress" of cultural endeavor, and nowhere more so than in the literary sphere. Thus does the "I" quest become central to the modernization process.[7]

In the literary domain, it is the critical establishment that modulates the process of evaluation. This very fact, as well as the double role played by many critics who are themselves writers, ensures a complicity between writer and critic that results ultimately in the criteria of evaluation and the hierarchy, boundaries, and divisions around which the history of literature is written. This complicity is suggested by the wordplay used here, "An I for an I," in which the critic's "eye" or view of the writer's "I" (self) can be seen to reflect a mirror image. The monumentalization of writer as hero or emblematic individual, including its negative representation of the writer as self-destructive decadent, can be seen as the critic's justification of the intellectual's social role and status. Although this aspect of analytical writing is undoubtedly true of all criticism, what makes it unusual in the case of modern Japanese literature is the predominance of so-called autobiographical fiction (*shishōsetsu*) and the prominence attached to it by critics. The "writer" becomes the staple fodder for his or her own writing, but, more important, the writer also becomes, via the critic, the paradigm of the individual, of the subject, of the self, and even of the nation. "The Meiji writer more than likely rejected the past, and he found the present whirling away and disappearing in the

distance before he could really catch hold of it. . . . He had cut himself off from the old and not yet found the new."[8]

The very "rationalization" used by critics to explain the phenomenon of the I-novel, that "end-product" of the Japanese writer's struggle for a modern identity, is revealing of the kind of complicity suggested here. It is argued by *bundan* critics from Itō Sei onward and American scholars such as Edward Seidensticker that the predilection for autobiographical writing stems from an inability to replicate, or the impossibility of replicating (stressing a more impersonal historical circumstance over an internal inadequacy), the French writer's fusion of objective science and fiction. "The Meiji novelist . . . rebelled strongly against the family system, but unlike the French realist, he had no very clear notion of what he was rejecting. . . . The disappearance of the past and the formlessness of the present made it impossible to grasp the historical moment as the French had done" (34). Seidensticker finds that the "lonely American writer of the nineteenth century" would have provided Japanese writers with a more parallel and hence instructive model than did French writers. The choice of an inappropriate model then leads the Japanese writer astray. "A European notion of the writer's responsibility thus had the perverse effect of making the Meiji writer wholly self-centered" (34).

The paradox or dilemma of the critic or historian of modern Japanese literature emerges here. Seidensticker, like Miyoshi, grounds his criticism of the Japanese novel in Japan's historical confrontation with the West yet ends up declaring the result a "failure" by applying rigid nineteenth-century English literary criteria. Seidensticker's designation of the I-novel as Japan's "main stream" and his judgment of it end up in a familiar assertion of Eurocentric, logocentric, teleological criticism:

> The main stream is thus a stream of novels centered upon their authors to an extreme that would not, I believe, be tolerated elsewhere. Authors are not required, as elsewhere, to make their novels stand on their own feet even when they happen to be about authors. The emphasis is on the expiatory or consummative act, and it is not noticed that the novel itself is frequently trivial and usually rather formless, wanting in Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end. (34)

## Silent and Tasteless

Katō Hidetoshi finds Naitō Kōnan's use of the *tōfu* or soybean-cake production process a suggestive metaphor for Japanese cultural production.[9] As brine is added to clear soybean soup to produce *tōfu*, the staple of Japanese cuisine, so, according to Katō and Naitō, has foreign civilization combined with the "original Japanese way of life" to produce such

"unique" features of Japanese culture as the Japanese writing system (especially the *kana* syllabaries), Japanese Buddhism (with its syncretism of native Shinto and Indo-Chinese Buddhism), and the tea ceremony. As Katō puts it, Japan's ultimate "authenticity" lies in its "ability to precipitate soybean cakes from the clear soup through the addition of brine." This view of Japanese culture as an "authentic" precipitate, to be distinguished from a chauvinistic "uniqueness" based on the assumption of a purely indigenous spontaneous evolution, sports a distinctively liberal democratic flavor, giving due recognition to the foreign input to Japanese culture. Thus, from poetry to Nō to Kabuki, one is invited to appreciate the *process* of transformation leading to the ultimate form of culture designated Japanese.

Critics and historians of Japanese literature may also find the soy-brine precipitate a congenial metaphor for describing Japanese culture. The net effect of this precipitate approach, however, is still to focus on the dichotomy inherent in the precipitate. Although *tōfu* is presumably the irreversible final product, the literary critics persist in sifting out the soy soup from the brine. Thus, beneath the Western veneer there is invariably something impenetrably Japanese.

> Somewhere in the substance of each modern piece of Japanese literature lies an element native to the core and as such utterly intransigent and unreconstructible.[10]

And this is true not only of individual works, but also of writers, genres, philosophies, and movements. Thus, Japanese naturalism tends to become not just naturalism as it developed in Japan, but an organically different product. We are concerned here with two such "precipitates," the Japanese autobiographical I-novel or *shishōsetsu* and the modern alienated writer/intellectual. Dazai Osamu, whose life and writing come to constitute a paradigm of intellectual alienation, emerges in modern Japanese literary criticism as the prototypical amalgam of these two. The ingredients here are text and writer, catalyzed by the modernization syndrome. In caricatural terms, we may say that the "superfluous hero" of middle Meiji, incarnated in the figure of Futabatei Shimei's Bunzō, develops into the traumatized intellectuals of Sōseki's "psychological novels" and emerges in the full bloom of twentieth-century modernity as the alienated writer-artist of Dazai's autobiographical fiction.

Let us consider the implications of the analogy of that staple of the Japanese diet *tōfu* in terms of critical responses to the Japanese autobiographical I-novel. As the Westerner eating *tōfu* for the first time is likely to declare, it would appear to be "tasteless." Of course, the intended meaning here is not "in bad taste," although surely this is one reaction elicited from Japanese writers and critics who have disparaged much of

this fiction for its being vulgar, scandalous, or unpalatable. Against this view of I-novel writers as "artistic deviants who have wrought untold harm on modern Japanese letters,"[11] Richard Bowring argues that "the whole genre cannot be dismissed on grounds of distortion" (the conflation of fiction and reality):

> Rather than continually criticizing the Japanese of this period for their inability to write a proper Western novel, it would seem preferable to treat the literature on its own merits. To assume that Japanese writers even wanted to write such novels betrays at best a rather parochial attitude and at worst a species of cultural arrogance.[12]

The most likely sense of "tasteless" here, however, is "without taste" at all. Most critics agree that the I-novel at its worst is worse than vulgar—it is tedious, boring, unedifying, "requir[ing] that we be interested in what the author had for breakfast."[13] But as with *tōfu*, whose defenders will point out not only the subtleness of its taste, but that it is nourishing and healthy, and moreover that it can be prepared in a variety of ways, so is the I-novel argued to have been good for the Japanese. "It was a good experience. It demonstrated the limits, the conditions, that have shaped modern Japanese literature."[14] Noriko Lippit is close to revisionist on the issue, calling the I-novel "the single most significant form that modern Japanese literature has produced" and a "unique product of Japanese writers' efforts for 'modernization,' efforts pursued in the context of their basic isolation from Japanese society."[15] To reinvoke the soy-brine analogy, a defender of the genre might argue that the I-novel is ultimately nourishing because the vital ingredient, the soybean, continues to provide protein. In this view, the brine of Western influence plays a catalyst role. If Lippit's emphasis is on the modernizing Japanese writer per se, however, others find the soy of the Japanese I-novel to be Japan's "premodern" traditions and values. Howard Hibbett and Masao Miyoshi, among others, tip their hats to the *zuihitsu* (essay) and its subjective mode, and Janet Walker argues the existence of a pre-Meiji "defense of the natural self," which "helped to lay the foundation both for the modern validation of the self and for the Meiji literature of the self."[16]

Finally, we might note the physical appurtenances of *tōfu*. Solid but fragile, firm and soft, able to assume a multiplicity of forms (much like Dazai's multiple selves), but also silent. Can it be said that *tōfu* is more silent than other foods? Probably not, and yet, just as silence reverberates in a Bashō haiku, so does the image of *tōfu*, perhaps enhanced by an association with Zen monastery cuisine, project silence. The I-novel, in which every word is understood as emanating directly from the writer's mouth and experience, is nonetheless heralded as the ultimate in literary silence. For Miyoshi, it becomes the high point of his argument that the

Japanese writer is a victim of the nonverbal imperatives of the Japanese language, and for Itō Sei, the relentless focus on one's personal life leads the writer to a dilemma in interpersonal relations that can be resolved only by no longer writing autobiographically.[17]

## Dazai's Double-Edged Dagger: The Critical Quandary

In the main, the critics end up with a mainstream they dislike or of which they are contemptuous. They find autobiographical writers boring, nonverbal, contradictory, victims of society or of the Japanese language. And Japanese criticism is in turn disparaged by Western critics for being biographical, subjective, anecdotal, and old-fashioned. This situation is partly a result of the social situation of both writer and critic in response to modernization and as part of the modernization syndrome.

The quest for a modern "self" conveys the initial infatuation with Western individualism of the early and mid-Meiji period, as reflected in the imported concepts of "self-made man" and in the choice of such books as Samuel Smile's *Self-Help* as one of the first Western works to be translated. The association of science with individualism, whereby technical progress is seen to rely on independent, assertive egos, then shifts gears with scientific naturalism. In Japanese literary circles, this results in a move to make the self not only the subject of scientific activity but its object as well.

Infatuation inevitably leads to disillusionment, stemming from a felt inadequacy, a gap, or a disparity, and reinforced by the perception that Japanese naturalism differed from its European counterpart. Sōseki's appeal for an "internal enlightenment" as a complement to Japan's successful "external enlightenment" is an eloquent acknowledgment of this sense of something missing. But Sōseki's conclusion, which invokes the same presumptions as the critics, is that the self does indeed represent an achievement of the Western cultural persona that need only be properly translated and ingested by Japan. It is therefore in a quasi-religious "quest" for this whole and hence holy self (which both is *and* represents Western superiority) that critics locate the development of modern Japanese literature. The "mainstream" becomes that quest as well as its own destination: the I-novel.

As Seidensticker argues, however, not all writers fit into this "mainstream" of autobiographical fiction. Yet the terms of definition that distinguish Kafū, Tanizaki, Kawabata, or Mishima from the "mainstream" depend just as much on the postulation of an equally elusive Japanese "self," more often than not identified with a nostalgia for an idealized, romantic past.

What is perhaps overlooked in this division between streams and

selves is precisely the metaphorical nature of the key construct used here: the self. As a metaphor, as Nietzsche and Derrida have argued, it can be seen to call attention not so much to a clear and coherent referent as to the gap or aporia that exists between language and what it seeks to convey. The self in Japanese literary studies is expected to fill a perceived gap between East and West as well as between society and the individual. As such the self comes to constitute an imaginary, indeed a utopian, space of fullness, of immediacy and presence. Perhaps it is this aporetic quality of the concept that recommends it so well to the literary imagination and that allows it to overlap so suggestively both with notions of mind and consciousness in psychology and philosophy and with independence and autonomy in the socio-political sphere.

In sum, the critical preoccupation with the I-novel requires the positing of a Japanese inability to depict a full and present reality and a concomitant assumption that such a full presence does obtain in the Western novel. Second, it implies an acute and prevalent sense of alienation, involving a potential "destabilization" of the relationship between individual and society (the fear of revolution or political unrest). This phenomenon has a bivalent aspect: on the one hand it is taken as a sociological indicator of modernity, and on the other—by virtue of the sense of estrangement from a Japanese (utopian communal) past and from a Western (utopian individualistic) future—it can be seen to reinforce the notion of modernity as a foreign transplant rejected by the body of the national culture. In this view, modernity is seen as the product of a natural, organic evolution in the West but as an import to Japan. Elided here is the impact of historical materialist forces, both internal and external, and the social disintegration resulting therefrom.

Consequently, the image of Japan, projected as an "individual" in standard historiographical mode,[18] is as an "alien" on the world scene. In both the East–West and North–South dichotomous schemes of world power and culture, Japan emerges as the alienated intellectual elite par excellence, suffering the pains and profits of being neither completely East nor West, neither North nor South, while being simultaneously victim and victimizer, economically wealthy and politically weak, and above all culturally sophisticated and unappreciated. What better combination of characteristics to describe the anomaly of the intellectual? Japanese critics and intellectuals suffered (while being able to articulate and hence capitalize on) not only a gap between their intellectual and social role (with its international ramifications), but a sense of historical discontinuity that contrasts with their perception of a Western historical continuity. Some emphasized the discontinuous, only to end up finding Japanese literature and society inadequate. Others have looked for continuity, excavating paradigms of the past with which to remodel the present. In this

process, the self-image of writer and critic as alienated intellectual, as outcast, requires a focus on the marginality of the artist in Japan's past and, paradoxically, the affirmation of the continuity of that outcast status.

In taking Dazai as a case in point here, we seek to show how the very marginality conferred on him by the critics reflects as much the status of writing and of the critic in general, and how in turn the marginality of literature itself casts doubt on the "centrality" of the nonliterary (i.e., society and politics). Okuno Takeo, perhaps the most eminent of Dazai critics, expresses the complicity of critic with writer when he states that "Dazai was for us Jesus bearing the cross of negativity."[19] In his classic study *Dazai Osamu ron*, Okuno writes: "Dazai resolved to lead a tragic life. . . . He plotted his own self-destruction, and it was because he was thus in a profound sense so faithful to his time that his life came to seem symbolic of this most unhappy period—the present" (24). In so many instances, Okuno's psychohistory of Dazai is punctuated by his own life crisis. The determining instance for him as a young man was his early postwar encounter with Dazai's persona and the "meaning" of it for his own life. From this "turning point" of his own, Okuno directs his subsequent life to a quest, through literary and psychological criticism, to discover a similar "turning point" in Dazai. The result is that Dazai's life becomes the material that is to explain his eventual self-destruction.

As Seidensticker has suggested, theories like Itō Sei's—that autobiographical novelists are driven by a chain reaction to either "silence or self-destruction"—are often more interesting for what they tell us of the critics who hold them. "Dazai the man precedes Dazai the writer in their considerations, just as throughout the course of the mainstream the author in his agony has been granted a romantic primacy he would be denied in more austere literatures." Seidensticker himself calls Dazai a "true original, with a bitter smile and a naked dagger turned always on himself."[20] Yet, what he may not be willing to admit is that that dagger, unsheathed by Dazai's text, can be seen to be also pointed at critics like Okuno, Itō, and others, who see in Dazai the marginality and frailty of their own textual and social existence as critic and intellectual. When Dazai attacks the "salon hypocrites" in "An Almanac of Agony" and "For Fifteen Years" (see Chapter Seven), he does so by rejecting the notion of a "turning point" and denying both the narrative coherence of psychohistory and the notion of a consistent (auto)biographical self. In the following pages, we will examine this "double-edged dagger" of Dazai's, but in order to appreciate better the dilemma of the Dazai critic, let us first consider critical studies of Dazai that deal with the issues of self, silence, and self-destruction in his texts.

## THE INSUFFICIENT "I"

There is no doubt a certain irony in the fact that Japan's Buddhist tradition has venerated some of the world's most radical questioning of assumptions about existence and the "self," whereas Japanese literary criticism accepts at "face" value the validity and primacy of an individual, modern "self" that remains somehow ever-elusive. The belief in such an entity is a basic assumption in the work of two scholars writing about Dazai, whose texts continue to elicit the assertion on the part of critics that the more "first-person" a writer, the more proof that the object of their quest, the "complete, vivid personality," can be realized, and indeed already exists in the more fully developed model of Western literature.

Masao Miyoshi, while eschewing the word "autobiographical" as a descriptive term, instead refers to Dazai's "first-person" as "*meta*-autobiographical," by which he intends an " 'I' [that] is insufficiently filled out to constitute a truly independent character."[21] Miyoshi, throughout his classic *Accomplices of Silence*, is concerned to show that the "self" and its extrapolations—personality, character, individuality—are natural or organic to the West and alien and artificial in Japan.[22]

> The self, that cornerstone of European humanism, is of course academically understood, but is nowhere felt as an everyday experience. The Japanese *Bildungsroman* is not so much about the self's discovery of the self as the self's discipline of itself into a production model hierarchically classified and blueprinted in detail by society at large. (xi)

For Miyoshi, autobiographical fiction in the West (his examples are Dickens, George Eliot, Lawrence, and Joyce) is the product of post-Renaissance individualism and not to be confused with the Japanese I-novel: "The difference is that [the Western authors] have managed to provide their surrogate characters with emotions and thoughts to some extent independent of the authors' own by taking a more or less clearly discernible stance vis-à-vis the characters" (125n).

Miyoshi's analysis of Dazai reflects the dilemma posed by modern Japanese literature. It is as if the critic is caught between his conceptual framework, requiring that he demonstrate a Japanese inability to project a self, and his own attraction to the very powerful self he perceives in Dazai. Thus, on the "minus" side, Dazai's work is said to suffer from an "absence of coherent unity," a "fragmentary" quality without any "evident common denominator" (125n). Dazai's efforts to create a fictional persona are judged "thin," and "his apparent preference for vocal complexity derives less from his overall artistic plan than from his serious

unease in the discipline of maintaining an ever fictional distance from his work" (126). A preoccupation with the "truth" of his life is considered to degenerate into "compulsive confessionalism" and "authorial intrusion" (126–127). Endowed with a fictional imagination "seldom sustained enough to fabricate a whole tale," Dazai is reduced to "reinterpretations" and "reevaluations" of Hamlet or traditional Japanese heroes, with results that are "almost unreadable" (131). As "a person [and a writer no less] with no developed sense of his own place" in a vertical society, Dazai is, as it were, consigned to . . . placelessness." He is "lost." What is more, "in the multiple-leveled Japanese language, Dazai's awkwardness in finding the correct social position for himself in the pyramid parallels his inability to find the correct level of reverence in speech" (137). Accordingly, Dazai, "at once rebel and philistine in language as in life . . . is always slightly bewildered, slightly fidgety where Japanese is concerned" (138).

But Dazai is also read "positively" by Miyoshi. We are told that the critics are "unanimous in seeing real talent in his rare sensitivity for language" (122). Notwithstanding the earlier mentioned Japanese "absence of self" (x), in Dazai's writing "it is always his own, very personal self who is speaking" (123). If there is a "monomaniacal 'first-person' quality about everything he wrote" (123), Dazai is, "unlike the run of the mill 'I-novelists,' remarkably versatile in varying his tones" (127). In speaking of the 1936 work "Human Lost" as an example of Dazai's poor fiction-making capacity, Miyoshi ends up praising his creation of a human personality with which the reader can identify: "A human being's life experience and his response to it are what constitute the work, not some severed self-enclosed imaginary experience" (129). Indeed, Miyoshi credits Dazai's lifelong oeuvre with the creation of an unforgettable persona: "Over the years we get to know him as though he were an old friend whose whole past is continually open before us" (129).

These dichotomous currents in Miyoshi's interpretation are transferred to his object Dazai, leading to a portrait of the author as a literary and social "paradox." Thus, "fiction was the 'truth' for him, that is, non-fiction—a paradox that shows itself whenever Dazai is read" (123). And, in a more complicated mode of analytical play, Dazai is credited with an "imaginary leap from the fictional (but in a way real) claim to selection by achievement to the literal (but fake) claim to selection by birth" (136). Miyoshi's perception of paradox here may be said to derive from normative judgments and assumptions of difference, between fiction and nonfiction and between self and society, that structure his view of both Japanese society and literature and that we have already described as the modernization syndrome. The result of this approach for Dazai and his

writing, and specifically for Dazai's 1947 novel *The Setting Sun*, is this evaluation of both writer and work:

> [Dazai] possessed neither an analytic mind nor adequate knowledge of his society to do anything about it. *The Setting Sun* is not only vague in its notion of aristocracy; it also lacks sufficient scale and the sort of developed attitude toward its society that would provide a powerful and comprehensive vision of postwar Japan. (137)

Miyoshi finally links Dazai's "inadequacies" to his overall thesis that the I-novel was a dead end for modern Japanese literature, and that, moreover, this dead end was inextricably linked to the Japanese language itself, such that Dazai's writing as well as his life and death mark him as "a victim of the Japanese novel, of the Japanese language" (140).

## The Permeable Self

Phyllis Lyons's depiction of Dazai, or of his "narrative voice," as a "permeable self" is ostensibly "opposed" to Miyoshi's view of Dazai's "insufficient 'I'."[23] Yet, despite its valuable caveats against a too-facile dichotomy between "Japanese" and "Western" "selves," with the inevitable normative hierarchization between "well-roundedness" and "shapelessness" (the Japanese cloth *furoshiki*, used to wrap objects of diverse shapes, is one suggestive metaphor used by Japanese critics),[24] Lyons's suggestion of "a special notion of the self" in Dazai's works is perhaps less "opposed" than it is "juxtaposed" to Miyoshi's "insufficient 'I.' "

Lyons's strategy is the familiar one of inversion, whereby the weaker, devalued element of opposition (in this case, the inadequate Japanese self) is now accorded privileged or superior status. After arguing the centrality to Western art and literature of the "usual illusion of 'well-roundedness,' " Lyons notes a recent, limited deviation from the trend in the West (perhaps to be associated with "modernist"), only to denigrate it with an assertion of hoary priority on the part of Japanese literature: "It is only recently, and not to the satisfaction of all critics, that our 'fiction' has been producing not three-dimensional bodies but disembodied spirits of the type that have haunted Japanese belles lettres for a thousand years" (95).[25] This new "fictionality" of the self also renders suspect the very representation of reality in art and literature, with the result that Western classical criteria become "themselves problematic" (98).

What Lyons does here is to propose not a problematization of the "self as construct" in Dazai, but rather an idealization of a self that is "other" than the familiar Western ideal version. In this enterprise, she seems to be positing a poststructuralist utopia, one in which logocentric assumptions do not apply, along the lines of Roland Barthes's *Empire of Signs*,

in which Japanese signifiers are liberated from their signifieds.[26] This "other" Japanese "self," however, is no less grounded in language and society than Barthes's signs, and the result is not so much a different self as it is a "superior" form of the same: "If we suppose in the Japanese case that their essential fictionality is somehow recognized a priori, accepted, and taken for granted, we immediately find that nevertheless *some* kind of 'self,' fierce and pungent, is talking to us in Dazai's work" (98). This highly qualified, conditional, and ambiguous constative affirmation is followed by a prescriptive injunction: "The identification of what kind of self this might be is the task of the reader and critic" (98). In other words, the fictionality of the self, instead of radically undermining the concept of self itself, here constitutes a mere displacement, a transference of the concept of the self to a "narrative voice," "persona of the author," or "permeable self." In the long run, it is a reconfirmation of the *bundan* view of Dazai as romantic antihero, alienated outcast, or in Lyons's terms, "observant scapegoat" (102).

Lyons's fundamental assumptions about literature as representation of a real, authentic structure of personality or subjectivity ultimately distinguish her little from the critics she seeks to dissociate herself from (Miyoshi, Ryan, and Rimer). She rejects the idea of fiction as representation only to substitute for it a notion of autobiographical fiction as clearly superior and more authentic representation. Textuality as such is never problematized, language is not an issue.

Lyons's "Dazai persona" is everything to everyone—it is the venerable ghost of Japanese belles lettres; it is a modern personal self, in the form of a familiar alienated consciousness; and it is "true to form," as evidenced by Dazai's fragmented, fractured narrative, discontinuous structures, plotlessness, and so forth (102). The result, paradoxically, is not only a *fuller* but also a more *authentic* self than the Western one! "The [*shishōsetsu*] genre is a kind of true history of the subjective self": "Dazai's whole literary work, I would argue, is an invitation to participate in the experience of one man's 'unreconstructed' emotions, carefully translated into a seductive art form" (100). The means to this end are through "style," through the elaboration of which the critic proposes to "reveal a complete, vivid personality not immediately and obviously captured in the narrative surface or the explicit characterization the writer provides" (100).

Once again, the goal here is the "revelation" of a "complete, vivid personality." Whereas Miyoshi argues that it is not there (but also that it is too much there!), however, Lyons maintains that it is hidden in the text, and that she can find it, through "style," her analysis of which is contained in a pithy phrase of Dazai's (adopted as her title) in his "Eight Views of Tokyo": "Art *is* me." In this phrase she locates (hidden beneath

the surface) a "playful extinction of what he suggests is a fake and unnecessary division between self and object, 'inside' and 'outside' " (101–102). But this observation, elaborated as a "seemingly diffuse-focus self-concept" and elevated to the status of "personal style of the writer Dazai," then has this claim made for it: "It is through just such a . . . self-concept . . . that we find the mind of the writer speaking directly to the reader" (102). In other words, Lyons's perception of a superior Japanese awareness of "fictionality" has not led to a problematization of writing, reading, or communication. To the contrary, it has produced an even better, more authentic writing, literature, and self! A further telling mark of the superior "representation" here is the conviction that "the reader too has slipped into so many personae that he [the reader] has become a part of this artwork, an accomplice of its style" (104).

As Lyons claims the ability to identify Dazai's "kind of self" at ever more recondite strata of style, we may note the appearance of a familiar critical syndrome, that of universalism. In asserting that "at a much deeper level, something else is happening, and this is where the reader begins to participate instead of just observe" (105), she reveals that "Dazai is dealing with a universal double-edged trap inherent in the human condition, namely, that we are most resentful precisely toward the people to whom we owe the deepest debt of obligation" (106).[27] We shall have occasion to consider a notion of resentment in Dazai in Chapter Eight in a more specifically historical perspective, but here we are faced with the problem of an analysis that ultimately reduces Dazai's self to the reader's self and to all selves. It is precisely such a notion of "equality" ("all men are alike") that spurs Naoji, one of Dazai's "voices" in *The Setting Sun*, like the narrative voice in "An Almanac of Agony," to his attack against the "salon hypocrisy" of critics and intellectuals, who seek to reduce writing and writers to coherent "stories" of their selves fit into a universal or historical paradigm.[28]

Lyons's "permeable self" lends itself well to the universalist mode, designed as it is to draw readers in as "active accomplices" (104) and as co-victims of seduction: "The narrator [of *No Longer Human*] seduces us subliminally into investigating those universal feelings none of us want to acknowledge" (106). Assertions of this magnitude may be true of all verbal and nonverbal communication, in which case identification of "universal feelings" may be either self-evident or impossible, but in any event they are of questionable value for literary criticism.

Lyons's attribution to Dazai of a "special notion of the self," which she labels the "permeable self," depends ultimately on this assumption of a universalism linking writer, reader, and message, "bridging the gap not just between East and West, but more universally, between writer and reader, and the written page" (94). This notion of universalism necessar-

ily suppresses a very different kind of reading of Dazai and his writing, one that we shall be seeking to develop in the subsequent chapters. The projecting of a universal, transhistorical, transcultural reader—whether universal or not to Dazai—abstracts him and his text from its socio-historical context when it may be more helpful to see his hypothetical interlocutors as middle-class, middle-aged bourgeois Japanese of the 1930s and 1940s, expected to be shocked, scandalized, and embarrassed by his textual machinations.

Lyons's key metaphor of a "permeable self" is not explained until the very end of her article (109), although it is alluded to earlier when she speaks of the "playful extinction" between self and object and of Dazai's "opening" of himself in order to "pull his audience in" (102). This process is presumably what leads to the readers' "active complicity" and "slipping into the personae" (104). When the "permeable self" is introduced, it is defined in opposition to that image of the self "as it is classically presented in Western fiction." For Lyons, "the familiarity one feels with Western literary characters is that of coming up against a barrier . . . you know you have come to the limits of 'your' self, because you feel the surface of another self" (109). As with her universal Dazai reader, here too we may question the "one" who feels familiarity with Western literary characters. Is not her caveat, quoted below, about positing a "universal" novel or writer, Japanese or Western, also valid for a univocal *reader*?

> The idea that there is some univocal entity called "the Western novel" or "Japanese fiction" is of course itself a fiction. There is no denying that Japanese are different from Americans . . . , but we can only guardedly speak in the same breath of Mori Ōgai and Yokomitsu Riichi, which is just as true of Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf. (96)

But the "permeable self" is also a metaphor aiming at an even more metaphysical transcendence.

> Dazai . . . invited his readers actively to merge with him, to enter into his mind, as fluids pass through a permeable membrane. There is something organic about the relationships he sets up. (109)

With such an osmotic perception, it is perhaps not surprising that to Lyons "Dazai asks that his readers play so many roles that eventually they too must become the conscious artist" (69). The wishful thinking of the critic? Why not? The critic must also convince her reader to become one with herself, to agree with and reflect—via her "more mechanistic metaphor" of a "clear, bare light bulb"—the "unique quality of mind" of Dazai. And as she invites her readers ("even Western readers") to "experience" their own "raw criticisms personally and directly when reading Dazai's almost too truthful stories," does she not also ask us to accept her

narrative voice as the permeable self of the Dazai critic? Does her "art *is* me" then not become what *we* may describe as a "criticism *is* me"?

All critics are caught in the bind of having to claim the validity of their own interpretation. What Lyons is doing, however, in "buying" her own reading of Dazai, which is a synthesis of a particular Dazai critical canon, is to posit an ideal Dazai critic/reader, who, in communing directly with the "bare light bulb" and "permeable self" of Dazai's literary persona, is indeed "communing" with the critic. For critic and reader are even more in complicity with each other than they are with the texts and authors of their mutual interest, these being reduced to mere pretexts for the meta-critical encounter.

The more structural problems with Lyons's analysis emerge with her concluding treatment of *The Setting Sun*, where she in effect abandons her basic premises, from the earlier "extinction" of the difference between fiction and nonfiction to the positing of an unmediated relationship between narrator and reader (107–109). As one of her concluding "corollaries," Lyons proposes the following:

> Interestingly enough, while the same stylistic principle of narrative manipulation seems to operate in Dazai's more "fictional" fiction as well (none of which can be viewed as purely fictional, from one point of view, since we never lack the persona of the author as self-conscious performer in the attitudes of at least one character in every story), in fact it does not work as successfully to create an intimate relationship between narrator and reader. (109)

Here it becomes clear that the thrust of Lyons's analysis is to replace the vivid, three-dimensional characters so highly valued by critics with an equally vivid "narrator or author-persona." Her disparagement of Miyoshi's quest for "intimacy" with characters (96), then, is not the radical questioning of assumptions it appears to be, no more than is her assertion "that our conclusions may differ radically depending on how much three-dimensional space we feel we need, and how vividly we feel the writer speaking to us" (96). She has merely displaced the criteria while maintaining the object in place. She has, moreover, and ironically, implied that a critic like Miyoshi has not been able to relate to the writer's persona "vividly speaking to us." Yet, as we have seen, it is Miyoshi's ambivalent response to Dazai that suggests how "mediated" and specific (not universal) is Dazai's narrative voice.

Part of the problem lies in Lyons's own conflation of narrator and author. Convinced as she is—and here she is in the company of the Japanese critical establishment—that the narrative voice or literary self is a more authentic Dazai than the historical person, she is at pains to show that self to be as coherent, unified, vivid, and three-dimensional as any

character in a Western novel. This effort leads the critic to presuppose the same systematic cohesion usually attributed to the author as a "living person," with the result that each work is read as a rereading of a familiar character, Dazai the narrator.

In the same manner, Lyons's attempt to outdo the Western "antinovel" by locating its distinctive features in the tradition of Japanese literature results not in a rejection of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction so much as in a displaced fictionality. On the one hand, she argues that the *shishōsetsu* represents a distinctively Japanese genre that envelops both of "the rigid Western domains of 'fact' and 'fiction' " (99). This genre is possible, she claims, because of a Japanese "a priori recognition" of fictionality (98), and Dazai is then the supreme exponent of this genre. But why, then, does she find it necessary to distinguish between Dazai's "more 'fictional' fiction" (107) and his "more strictly autobiographical works" (108), and why, then, the paradox that it is precisely in such a "more 'fictional' " work, in this instance *The Setting Sun*, that the "permeable self" does "not work as successfully to create an intimate relationship" (107)? This admission is especially significant in view of *The Setting Sun*'s prominence as Dazai's masterpiece, the work that presumably spoke so directly and evocatively to the Japanese people's wartime and postwar experience. It is likewise so in the light of Masao Miyoshi's designation of it as "the best known" of Dazai's I-novels, the "*shishōsetsu* par excellence."[29]

Yet Lyons finds that "only rarely does this novel 'open' to the reader." And even the "most permeable section" of the novel turns out to be "massively flawed" by "barriers." Apparently it is the "indeterminacy" of narrative voice, a "turgidness" as opposed to "a translucency," caused by "third-person observation," that results in the protagonist Kazuko not "opening" herself sufficiently to the reader (108). The resulting judgment sounds strikingly similar to Miyoshi's diagnosis of an insufficiently developed self: "Throughout the novel, Kazuko never emerges externally as a fully dimensional character, although we spend the whole novel within the unique quality of her mind . . . ; here, we fail to 'see' her as a separate self in a special way" (109). To all appearances, Lyons is admitting and seconding Miyoshi's judgment to the effect that "[Kazuko] is scarcely brought to life in the novel"[30] and, hence, is at one with those character types—and "not living individuals"—who are "abstracts finally . . . and not portraits of real people. As such they . . . simply can't be seen clearly in relief apart from the narrative."[31]

As if aware of this dangerous liaison with Miyoshi, Lyons abruptly shifts gears in conclusion, moving from the fictional text of *The Setting Sun* to the abstraction of the permeable self, whose presence she is convinced is there behind or within the text, and which is accessible as a

"unique quality of mind." The displacement worked here shifts our focus from a "classical novel" approach, in which Dazai is shown to fail, to an autobiographical fiction mode, where the looser criteria allow for the assertion of "ghostly" selves. Thus it is that we as "Western readers" are asked to suspend "considerations of plot logic, and consistency or completeness of characterization," for these are "not crucial to judging the impact of Dazai's work" (110). Instead, we are encouraged to feel the immediacy and identification that Miyoshi told us was lacking in Japanese fiction: "Even Western readers often feel a sense of having 'experienced' their own raw emotions personally and directly when reading Dazai's almost too truthful stories" (110).

## The "Last" I-Novelist

> Dazai himself, as I read the modern Japanese novel,
> constitutes both climax and conclusion of
> the I-novel tradition.
> —Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*

> Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares
> to find it.
> —Candace Lang, "Autobiography in the
> Aftermath of Romanticism"

*The Setting Sun* is seen by certain critics as the culminating point of the I-novel. The fact that it involves a more apparent and more complex use of fictional projection seems only to spur the critics on even further to uncover the "true" underlying autobiographical inspiration for it.[32] Thus, the Dazai self is seen to bifurcate and trifurcate into Naoji and Uehara and/or Kazuko.[33] At the semic level, too, the suicide, Naoji, fits the pattern of the classical romantic hero while emblematizing the family's fall from nobility, which is in turn a metaphoric representation of the decline of Japan's aristocracy.

A further homology is suggested by Miyoshi, who fits the story of the Japanese novel itself, with *The Setting Sun* as a paradigmatic example, into a narrative of modern Japanese literature. The rise and decline of the autobiographical I-novel becomes the metaphor of Japanese literature's own story of success and failure in the twentieth century.

For Miyoshi, Dazai becomes the end point of the I-novel, which in turn "reaches a dead end once the author's life is completely exposed" (139); he becomes "a victim of the Japanese novel, of the Japanese language" (140). The writer of the I-novel, argues Miyoshi, "is never free of the temptation of suicide" because the I-novel, "by its own logic, will not close until the writer's life does" (139–140). Yet the logic of the critic here

may be misreading Dazai and the I-novel. For to the extent that this "logical" requirement of closure is structural to the I-novel, surely it is so of autobiography as well, if not of fiction and even nonfiction in general. Concealed within this argument is a hermetic view of the self, through which the critic posits the notion of exhausting or fully exposing one's life. The textuality of memory at the conscious level alone (without even considering the vast narrative potential of psychoanalytic explorations, and Dazai does make considerable narrative use of dreams) is the very antithesis of closure. Indeed, it is precisely Dazai's varied and unpredictable textualizations, including his "disembodied narrative voices" and "permeable selves," that resist such critical attempts at closure and surely help to account for continued reader and critical interest in Dazai.

The temptation remains strong to see Dazai as identical with his text, to allegorize him and his works as part of a preconceived paradigm—that of the modern alienated writer "unable" to create distanced fictional characters. To shift gears just a bit, let us entertain the idea that what Dazai was engaged in was more what Michel Beaujour has called a "self-portrait." Unlike either autobiography or autobiographical fiction, the self-portrait by definition demonstrates the very futility of self-representation. "The self-portrait . . . can never represent anything but the impossibility of self-representation in the first place, and what [Beaujour] calls a rhetorical self as the interpretation of that predicament in the second place."[34] And indeed, there are Japanese critics like Aeba Takao who argue that Dazai's first-person voice or "I" is not to be taken as identical to a "self" reducible to autobiography. Rather, Dazai's "self" is a tool, a diversified rhetorical device situated somewhere between reality and fiction.[35]

As Candace Lang argues, in introducing Henri Beyle (Stendhal) as a writer who "problematized" autobiography, such an approach "is in no way a sophisticated new critical invention."[36] We may extend her observation and note that such "problematizing" is not specific to Anglo-American criticism, either. Indeed, while the intellectual roots of poststructuralist criticism (for Lang, these are to be located in Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, and Saussure) are hardly identical, the problematization of the self in Japan and the concomitant hegemony of a romantic tradition of the autobiographical novel are similar in instructive ways. We have argued, for example, that Dazai challenges the tradition of the romantic self in Japan in his way much as Roland Barthes does in his. In Dazai's case, the cross-cultural contrast with Alvarez, involving suicide and literature, is especially illuminating. Where suicide for Alvarez becomes a way of affirming the romantic tradition of the self and, indeed, carving out a distinctive niche for himself in it, for Dazai suicide is a way of undermining the construct of the self, problematizing it and the tradition built upon

it. Since this tradition in Japan is itself situated in a problematic stance with regard to European literature, it is not surprising that Dazai's texts, while drawing freely from that tradition, also problematize that relationship.

The detached irony and self-consciousness about writing that permeate Dazai's texts suggest the possibility of seeing him as a precursor of what Linda Hutcheon has called "metafictional writing."[37] Dazai shares with few others (Haniya Yutaka being a possible one) a self-consciousness not only of his own ego or voice, but of what Hutcheon calls "the context-dependent nature of linguistic meaning." The metafictional writer—Hutcheon lists Fowles, Barth, García Márquez, and Nabokov as examples—is one "for whom the linguistic and narrative identity of the text frequently serves to constitute the content as well as the form of fiction" (34). Situated within the modern mode of realism, the texts of a metafictional writer constitute an "occult practice" within that dominant discursive model. This occult practice "gradually subverts the model by revealing in the theory such conflicting internal contradictions that certain forms of the practice itself begin to become tools of analysis" (34). Hutcheon refers specifically to the situation of Western discourse, where the dominant model since the seventeenth century has been an "analytico-referential" one (positivist, capitalist, modern) and in which the "enunciating subject as discursive activity" has been suppressed, or "occulted."

> In the collective name of scientific universality and objectivity, of novelistic realism, or of critical anti-Romanticism, the enunciating entity is what has been suppressed—both in an individual subject and even as the postulated producer of a "situated" discourse. (34)

Perhaps this observation can help to explain why the autobiographical realism of the I-novel is seen as a distorted, derived, contrived fiction, a contradiction in terms, as is demonstrated by Iwanaga Yutaka's judgment of Tayama Katai's *The Quilt* (1907), that prototype of the I-novel said to have "changed the course of Japanese literature."[38]

> The hero of *The Quilt* is the author himself, and the other characters and incidents actually existed; there is no intrinsic difference between the novel and reality. Despite minor alterations of names and places, *this is not a world created independently of reality, but merely a distortion of the facts.*[39]

The critical privileging of what is determined to be "purely imaginative fiction"—which must nonetheless be plausible (i.e., conform to reality)—as against a "mere distortion of facts" is the knotty dilemma of modern criticism. It is repeated in the convoluted arguments about Dazai's self and nonself and is epitomized in Miyoshi's comment about Dazai's "imaginary leap from the fictional (but in a way real) . . . to the literal (but in a

way fake)."[40] It is in this context that Dazai's own texts give indications of a "postmodernist" awareness in his "occulted practice" of suicidal narration. For Dazai, it is the very opposition erected between fiction and fact, as between self and other, that is the distortion, for it is part of the hegemonic model's way of controlling discourse and its enunciating subject. Thus, to both Iwanaga's and Miyoshi's excessive concern with what is fact and what is fiction, Dazai's narrator in "An Almanac of Agony" insists on the fragmentation of self, experience, and history, and proclaims the fragment as less susceptible to the "transparent distortion" of the objective, positivist "historians" and "thinkers."[41]

As Miyoshi acknowledges in his Preface to *Accomplices of Silence*, after judging the Japanese novel a failure according to all four of his criteria of the modern (Western) novel, there are several exceptions, and it may even be that "one can comfortably think of [Sōseki's] *Pillow of Grass* or Kawabata's more 'Japanese' works in the company of . . . Western anti-novels."[42] Similarly, it may be argued that Dazai's textual production, within the Japanese "subtext," points to the emergence of such a postmodernist awareness; that it derives from the "occulted practice" of the preceding century; that its emergence in the 1930s and 1940s was due to the crisis of language and literature occurring before, during, and after the war, and including the phenomenon of ideological crisis emblematized by *tenkō;* that this perception proved to be short-lived and limited to a few writers, of whom Dazai was one; that it was substantially resubmerged or "reocculted" in the "reverse course" syndrome of the postwar period; and, finally, that Dazai's self-reflexive metafiction had already allowed for this eventuality.

The two readings of Dazai we have juxtaposed in this chapter both suffer from what critic Aeba Takao has called an "effort to push Dazai beyond time."[43] For many people, according to Aeba, talking about Dazai is equivalent to the embarrassment of speaking about one's "youth," that time when "feelings betray reason, turning recently grasped ideas into untruths" (3). And it is because reason and ideas then seek revenge upon feelings that people, seeking to ease the anguish of internal strife, repress their past, "try to forget 'youth.' " Reading Dazai for such people turns into a narcissistic "self-discovery" by a "process of assimilation" in which "there is ultimately no separation between [self and] object." (5). Moreover, the " 'naturalness' of this process becomes its own self-corroboration or 'self-evidence' (*jiko-shōmei*)" (5).

Aeba does not deny the psychohistory of the historical individual Dazai Osamu. What he objects to is the tendency on the part of critics to erect a homogeneous, harmonious single image of Dazai corresponding to a similarly unproblematized authentic "youth." What he proposes is a

more historical view of Dazai, his life and writing, by seeing them in relation to the history of that construct, the "self," in modern Japanese literature. Proposing a triad of such literary "selves," he distinguishes a "lucid" unproblematical "I" (Kobayashi Hideo) from an "ecstatic" (fusing self and country) "I" (Yasuda Yojūrō), and both of these from Dazai's "deranged 'I'."

> Needless to say, this "I" does not, even in its mode of expression, depend on the traditional felicitous egoism of "self"-belief nor does it derive from literary realism. Accordingly, it was hardly fortuitous that an unprecedented literary technique emerged from this painfully contradictory "I." Dazai's works constitute a world produced by individual language in which the very space between language and thought is the world's modus operandus. It is not a world which can be reduced to the "I-novel" of mere realistic description. (4)

The issue for Aeba is not Dazai's place in the "lineage of the I-novel" or the adequacy or inadequacy of his permeable or impermeable self. Seeing the "I" rather as a construction built in turn on other narratives about a projected, imagined, repressed past, he sees Dazai's literature as a way of examining the disjunction between self and "modernity" in contemporary Japan.

As Aeba implies, there is a healthy and a not so healthy approach to Dazai. Needless to say, we, as he, intend to align ourselves with the former, preferring not to see in Dazai our individual selves or past sins, or to derive vicarious or "unmediated" pleasure, pain, or confirmation from universal prototypes of human behavior. Rather than seeing Dazai, as does Miyoshi, as a "victim of the Japanese novel, of the Japanese language," or, like Lyons, as a "manipulator of narrative" and of the reader, we will see rather how the language of Dazai's texts may be read in conjunction with Dazai criticism to call attention to the metacritical context in which we operate. This approach will lead us through a consideration of several of Dazai's early and late texts, through key critical works, as well as through several paradigms of literary history threading these texts.

## *Chapter Five*

# DYING TWICE: ALLEGORIES OF IMPOSSIBILITY

> Allegories are always allegories of metaphor and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading.
> —Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*

> [W]hen the imagination of death fails you on some primary level, its commonplace or stereotypical representations need to be repeated, worked through, and exhausted by a narrative which, having taken you through death unsuccessfully a first time, can now recuperate this failure by bringing the reading mind up short against the unpremeditated shock of a *second* dying.
> —Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*

WRITERS and critics both seem caught in a bind. Their writing calls for control, mastery, concentration of thought, coordination of mind and hand—all aspects of our notion of a unified, coherent self. And yet their efforts to focus on and create narratives of similarly coherent subjects are subverted by a flashing awareness that those subjects exist only so long as the mind sees them as such. Critics such as Lang, Beaujour, and Hutcheon in a sense seek to meet the contradiction head on by legitimizing a writing that is skeptical of itself, and by locating acts of textual resistance to the prevalence for hypostasizing unmediated subjectivity and meaning.

That suicidal narratives should provide an instance of such resistance is not strange. Suicide is a challenge both to the individual and to the collectivity, for it threatens the extinction of all life and human consciousness. But there is a significant difference between suicide as a theme within a narrative and suicide as the structural component of narrative meaning. In the present chapter, we will consider a short story of Dazai's in which suicide functions to thwart meaning. This early work, "Metamorphosis" (*Gyofukuki*, 1933), involves the transformation of presumed subjects into nonhuman forms, suggestive in Kafkaesque terms of escape from the oppressiveness of society and self. But above all it features a

curious second suicide, leading to an insistence on the metaphoricity of self, death, and meaning.

Dazai wrote a number of other "fictional" stories in addition to "Metamorphosis." But at the same time, he began writing what was to become a lifelong narrative of first-person accounts of events of his life as well as reflections on private and public matters. These writings highlight suicidal intention as a generator of Dazai's texts. From his earliest texts, suicide becomes a goal post toward which the writer aims. And as the narrative grows by both displacing (postponing) and surviving attempts at self-destruction, it becomes clear that suicide is a metaphor for resistance to narrative closure.

## The Drowning Fish

The story "Metamorphosis" is particularly suitable for demonstrating the allegorical nature of Dazai's life narrative in that double sense of (a) a process of establishing an extratextual meaning (negativity), and (b) an attempt to subvert that process even as it unfolds. We shall first see how this brief but concentrated piece of writing can be shown not only to prefigure Dazai's future work and life but also to contain an awareness of the futility of literature as allegory as well as of the fundamental metaphorical nature of language itself.[1] To the extent that the language of allegory is itself a metaphor for another "truth," a truth that remains forever at one remove, allegory, as Paul de Man suggests, can at best stand not for that truth but for the impossibility of reaching it. Thus, we shall argue, Dazai's image of the suicidal fish, a fish that appears to realize the metaphor of negative meaning by drowning (!) into nonbeing, seeks to subvert the process of allegorization even as it develops.

Three contextual categories are relevant for our analysis. First, there is the historical context of Japan in the 1930s, including the effective suppression of the entire political left by 1932, and the forced (under police duress) apostasy or recantation (*tenkō*) of numerous writers and other public figures, both of these set against a background of increasing domestic instability and expanding Japanese imperialism in Asia. Second, in a more biographical vein, there are the student and underground left associations of the author Dazai; his confusion and guilt toward his provincial landlord class background; his traumatic involvement in an abortive double-suicide in which his companion, a bar hostess, drowned while he was absolved of all suspicion as the son of a "good" family; his stormy relationship with a geisha from his home in the north of Japan and tensions with his family as a result of this; and his almost simultaneous breakup with her and official abnegation of the left-wing. And third, mention must be made of that "bracketed" posttextual context of Dazai's

subsequent success and notoriety as a decadent, nihilistic writer from the late 1930s until his premature death in 1948.

Written in 1933, when Dazai was twenty-four, "Metamorphosis" is based on an earlier tale titled "The Carp That Came to My Dream" by the eighteenth-century author Ueda Akinari (1734–1809).[2] In Ueda's tale a dying priest, Kōgi, who has been duly observant of the Buddhist dictum to respect all forms of life and who is very skillful at painting fish, is granted his desire to be transformed into the object of his art, a beautiful golden carp. He swims leisurely about Lake Biwa but is caught and sold to a restaurant. He is just about to be carved into filets when he awakens to find he has been dreaming. Ueda leaves the question of dream and reality open, however, by maintaining that Kōgi was indeed dead during those three days and that the fish had in fact been caught and prepared for dinner.

In Dazai's story, the hero is no longer a priest but an adolescent girl, Suwa, the daughter of a gruff, taciturn charcoal maker in a remote and isolated region of northern Japan. During the summer months Suwa runs a small concession where she sells lemonade to tourists who come to visit the waterfall. Minor details and incidents, including the accidental death of a botany student who slips into the waterfall while looking for plants, heighten the atmosphere of gloom and premonition. Suwa herself, through a process of observation and reflection, mostly of the waterfall, seems to change from a lighthearted girl to a moody, rebellious young woman. She expresses this change at one point by confronting her father, whose life rotates between making charcoal and getting drunk after selling it in town, with the suggestion that he leads a meaningless life. He is infuriated and almost strikes her. Shortly thereafter on a wintry, snowy, ghostly night, he returns from town drunk and rapes her. She runs out in a state of shock, heads instinctively for the waterfall, and plunges into the basin.

It is here that Dazai incorporates the earlier tale, but with a peculiar twist. Suwa is transformed into a carp and swims leisurely about, apparently enjoying her new-found freedom. Suddenly, the fish comes to a halt, pauses as if in meditation, and then swims directly toward the whirlpool beneath the fall where its body is "sucked up like a dead leaf" (288).

In this brief tale, Dazai draws on all the history, myth, and lore of his native northern region: the legend-filled mountains of the charcoal-makers, the woodcutters, the aborigines, and the demons. He combines just enough precise geographical information to give a sense of immediacy and reality with an aura of remote antiquity extending back to prehistoric mysteries to allow for the possibility of the unreal. Early mention of the geological fact that this entire region was once a lake establishes a link between geo-historical supposition and narrative legend and lore, as well

as suggesting the possibility of the evolutionary transformation and physical separation by water that activate the story.

Narrative resistance to a cohesive voice is already apparent in the narrator's self-intrusion into the description of the story's setting. In the midst of an otherwise "objective" account of the landscape, the voice assertively affirms its own idiosyncratic view in place of the local folklore. Though popular tradition has named the mountain in question "Horse Hill" for its resemblance to a galloping horse, the narrator says: "In fact . . . it resembles the profile of a decrepit old man" (285). Although the insertion serves to heighten the ominous tone of the piece, it also has the effect of interposing, and indeed calling attention to, the presence of a subjective mind between the reader and the story.

"Metamorphosis" takes as its time a few crucial days in a year of a girl's life. We know that Suwa's life is not always as intense as the sparse description in the story makes it. Yet we also sense that the boredom, futility, revolt, and violence are not unreal. This effect is achieved through a simultaneous reduction and suspension of time. The setting is presented as an impermanent creation of nature, subject to the whims of geology (glacier, erosion) and history (mention is made of Japan's most beloved hero, Yoshitsune). Even rocks and mountains, as we have seen above with Horse Hill, are subject to interpretation, depending on how one looks at them. Japan is after all an island, surrounded on all sides by water. Against this backdrop are glimpsed the lives of two small people, lives whose duration is further reduced to less than a year's time, then to a few days, and hours, and minutes. Set as they are against the ever recurring seasons of nature, however, the moments of passion, as of boredom, become suspended in the vast expanse of geological and historical time. Suwa's moments of perception—the accidental fall into water, the sudden pain of sexual violence, and her own deliberate leap into water—as small as the human imagination can make them in literature, become large beyond belief, out of perspective, as they do in human life itself.

Against this backdrop of geological time, the action of "Metamorphosis" is in dramatic correspondence with the changing seasons and the immediate scenery. Each of the first three parts of the story cinematically zooms in from a panorama to a clearly focused scene, defining the time successively as a day in late summer, a day in early autumn, and a day in late autumn. With each shift of scene and time, the surrounding nature imagery shifts to accommodate the season and the dramatic mood. Certain traditional images, leaves and water, become specifically symbolic of change, impermanence, and the maturation process. Significantly, the final image of the story, "sucked up like a fallen leaf," identifies the return to nothingness that Suwa is trying to engineer.

Water is a structurally unifying element in "Metamorphosis." Physi-

cally and spiritually it is the medium that moves the action, advancing Suwa's evolution. The watery death at the beginning is a prelude to the watery transformation at the end, connected by the story of Hachirō's watery transformation into a serpent in the middle,[3] as well as by Suwa's constant intimacy with the waterfall. The story of Hachirō and Saburō, recalled while watching the waterfall, unites all the elements of Suwa's past, present, and future experience (286–287). It connects her observation of death with the idea of change and transformation inspired by her contemplation of the waterfall. And beyond adding the element of transformation, which will soon affect her own physical body, it adds another one: separation. Suwa recalls that when she heard the story from her father as a small child, she found the plight of the two brothers sad. Her spontaneous baby gesture was to place her father's finger in her mouth. Since Suwa's mother has apparently never existed for her, the suggestion here is also "separation" from the force that gave her life. At the same time, and in view of the succeeding events in the story, and the proclivities of two isolated human beings, the sexual implications begin to emerge.

Both bluntness and brevity of dialogue accentuate the antisocial character one would expect of isolated people and draw attention to the unusual importance of every remark. In this mountain area, no resources are wasted: the coal, the mushrooms, the scenery, and of course human energy, which, as we gather from the story, seems to include not only human language but even human thought and affection. The implication seems to be that human capacities are indeed valuable, but not to the same degree as material resources. One wonders if there is not implicit a criticism of Dazai's own family, especially in the light of such works as "Reminiscences," which highlights the author-narrator's impression of having been a neglected child, and of his high school works, which castigate family and father in particular. In reacting against this sense of affective deprivation as a child, Dazai was also, from his alienated vantage point as a "younger son," calling attention to the ranking of children in the order of future economic and social importance.

The scarcity and bluntness of dialogue in the case of Suwa and her father is not, as is sometimes the case, to suggest intuitive understanding and affection; its effect is rather to underline a process of progressive estrangement. The use of a single word in dialect often has a very telling effect: the term used by Suwa to refer to her father, "Odo," is uttered dramatically at the last moment, just as Suwa is about to plunge into the water. It is said softly, in contrast to the " 'Dumb ass!' " (*ahō*) that Suwa had previously screamed at her father, suggesting that she has now reconciled herself to her fate. Perhaps on the verge of death, she loses some of her hostility to her father and is ready to consider him human again

(unlike wishing him dead before). Or perhaps the word signals a nostalgic reference to him in memory of her early childhood, when he acted more like a daddy, more like her "Odo."

"Metamorphosis" may be seen as an attempt to strip reality to its bare essentials in the form of allegory and symbol. In the attempt to find a suitable narrative voice, however, Dazai finds himself shifting uneasily from the point of view of the objective storyteller to the subjective mind of Suwa or of himself as author-narrator unable to remain aloof. From the accidental death at the waterfall to Suwa's newly discovered freedom as a fish, the text moves us in and out of the heroine's mind. At a critical juncture, however, the narrator describes what Suwa is thinking in an encapsulated, metaphorical, and unemotional way, giving a synthetic and purposeful account of her development. Contemplating the seemingly never-ending quantity of water that falls from the mountain, and the apparently unchanging shape of the cascade, Suwa goes through an elaborate series of observations and deductions, noting that there is a definite physical change from one substance to another, evidenced by changing in color and texture. The elaborate rendering of this thought process through the use of a sequence of verbs of perception and logic (discovered, realized, understood, supposed, considered) suggests the maturation process of an adolescent in terms of her "subjective" existence.

Suwa has already experienced excitement and curiosity about the waterfall with three of her senses: sight (the drowning); touch (swimming nude in the pool); and hearing (the story of the two brothers, Hachirō and Saburō, which she recalls from her childhood). She has lived in implicit immersion in either the substance or the sight and sound of the water. It is only natural that at the time her body awakens as a woman her mind should also awaken, and that the object of her attention should be that substance which has embraced and consoled her on occasion. There is here the poetic suggestion that Suwa, in realizing that water *does* change form, also realizes that she herself *can* change form (from girl to woman, from slave to free person, but also from human to animal, from being to nothingness).

The process of thought itself as described in this passage further reinforces Suwa's capacity to think for herself and to distinguish forms. Her appreciation, moreover, that natural forms (including human beings and their creations) are all in a process of perpetual change suggests a Buddhist appreciation of impermanence. The ambiguity of form (water or cloud) recalls the initial confusion over the shape of Horse Hill, but what is strikingly present in the girl and apparently lacking in the narrator is a readiness to accept change. It would seem that the latter is in struggle with his own story and with his own heroine. He insists on his own version of the mountain, resisting the implications of the geological history

of the area that change is inevitable. With Suwa, on the other hand, the insight begins to emerge, though it remains elusive, that death, in the broad context of time, is not a final enslaving process but a part of a process of transformation that means renewal, liberation, and freedom.

It is the conclusion of "Metamorphosis" that crystallizes the textual dilemma. There is an ambivalence here that is not just a lapse of consciousness. First there is a leap from a heavy realism to legend-inspired fantasy. Prior to part 4 (Suwa's metamorphosis), in spite of allusions to and intimations of the fantastic, the story has been overpoweringly realistic, even surrealistic, in terms of the bold contours that Suwa and her father carve out of the clear, stark setting of the north. The transition to part 4 is narrated simply and dryly. "Gray darkness surrounded her when she came to her senses. . . . Cold permeated her flesh" (288). There is no suggestion that this is a dream. The ambiguity intensifies as the point of view seems to shift suddenly once again in the middle of part 4. From the subjective mind of the fish-Suwa, the reader is reintroduced to the original omniscient narrator who describes *a* fish. It is never established that the fish described from here to the final whirlpool is actually Suwa. This is of course the expectation of the reader, and the fish's subsequent actions tend to confirm our identification of the fish as Suwa. It is also possible, however, that it is the drowning Suwa who is observing this fish, or that it is she transformed into a fish observing a second fish. In the final analysis, it is not really clear whether death or transformation or both have taken place. A fish has been sucked into the whirlpool. The story ends there.

## Suicide and Second Death

"Metamorphosis" projects a world that may be described as surreal. The interweaving of two psychological "real" human beings interacting with a traditional ghostly setting makes their harsh compressed existence stand out in dramatic relief. Postwar readers, invariably familiar with the details of Dazai's life (from his fear of an authoritarian father to numerous incidents of revolt against family, school, and society) have little trouble in identifying Suwa with Dazai as a victim of oppression (adjusting of course for the transfer to a female victim), pushed to the point of revolt and desperate escape through suicide or self-delusion. Most attractive to the critic in this connection are the two traumatic incidents previously mentioned that occurred prior to the writing of "Metamorphosis": Dazai's attempted love suicide with a barmaid in which she drowned and he survived (November 1930), and his defecting from the communist movement by "giving himself up" to the police in the summer of 1932. The circumstances surrounding both events are obscure, yet it is not hard to

see how the rebellion and suicide of "Metamorphosis" can be interpreted in terms of the author's real life experience. Indeed, Dazai was to refer on several occasions to the death of the barmaid as the "black spot" spreading out and "staining" his writing and his life.[4]

It is Suwa's suicide and transformation that raise the issue of escape and freedom from oppression. The world beneath the water is, in traditional Japanese folklore, simultaneously a place of death and of utopian freedom.[5] Suwa's metamorphosis, like Kōgi's in "The Carp That Came to My Dream," is an imagined realization of pure freedom entailing a fundamental separation from the conditions of her oppression. Involving a shift to a new medium (from land to water) and a new form (from human to fish), it is no less an escape from time itself, from the present, or, in evolutionary terms, from an advanced to a lower and less complex state of existence. It is hence a liberation not just from the bonds of human society but from the essence of humanity itself, which, as Suwa's reflections on the protean nature of water suggest, is intuitively connected with the process of "thinking," of consciousness.

It is Suwa's "second suicide," however, in her metamorphosed fish form, that suggests that liberation as escape is somehow inadequate. As Dazai put it, a bird must have air resistance in order to fly. Thus, in a vacuum, in total isolation, and no less in the idealist reaches of past time, there is no oppressor and therefore no oppressed. But by the same token, there is no responsibility, no history, no society, and no need for freedom. There is only oblivion, nothingness. And so, it may be argued, Dazai has his fish swim toward the whirlpool in search of an absolute, final death. Freedom is impossible, so why bother? With this coherent interpretation, we have the prefiguration of Dazai's later despair, suicide attempts, and generally self-destructive, decadent nature.

There are, however, a number of loose ends. There is, first of all, the paradox of the drowned fish (how does a fish drown?). There is the ambiguity of the final disappearance—the fish is not destroyed but merely drawn into what may very well be an even lower state of evolution, one suggested by the final plant image, a leaf. There is the extratextual evidence of Dazai's own comments, in which his preoccupation with his self-esteem would appear to preclude any interest in revitalizing Ueda's Buddhist metaphor for the dream-like nature of life: "I read the tale during a very trying period of my life. . . . I fantasized about becoming a fish myself in order to get the last laugh on those who had humiliated and oppressed me. This scheme of mine seems to have failed. Maybe it wasn't such a great idea after all."[6] Finally, there is his letter to a friend, in which he revealed that his original impulse had been to end the story with an additional sentence: "Three days later Suwa's unsightly corpse washed up against the village bridge."[7] In the same letter, Dazai wrote

that he later regretted having removed this sentence. Presumably this other ending would have given the impression of actual death and of narrative closure, which the final version avoided. It would have accounted for the possibility that Suwa did not actually turn into a fish but only had hallucinations as she drowned. The fish in the whirlpool might not have been Suwa at all but an imagistic dream equivalent of her drowning. The final version, however, reinforced by a shift in narrative perspective, suggests a desire for an open-ended narrative that links this work with Dazai's ongoing string of narratives of death and suicide, of repeated and endless displacements of death.

In this connection, it may be helpful to consider the implications of "second death" raised by Fredric Jameson in the last chapter, titled "How to Die Twice," of his study of Wyndham Lewis,[8] and then to examine how Dazai's suicidal narrative is displaced toward his experiment with autobiographical fiction, in his "Reminiscences," written at the same time as "Metamorphosis." Jameson borrows the notion of "second death" from Jacques Lacan's interpretation of it as it appears in the Marquis de Sade's *Histoire de Juliette*. Lacan's project is to explain why Sade and his libertine protagonist Saint-Fond find it necessary to subvert their own libertinism and posit a belief in an afterlife, in which their victims' suffering may be extended. Jameson argues that both Lacan's and Freud's notion of desire (including Freud's death wish), as an instinctual drive that cannot ultimately be satisfied, has significant implications for narrative. Desire invariably becomes a representation of some sort, even within the subject's imagination, thus acknowledging the existence of a "structure gap between the text of desire and its reenactment" (165). What Sade's "higher level" pornography does, according to Lacan, is to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual and gratifying realization of desire, and instead to substitute for it a symbolic reduplication of physical death.

> "Second death" is thus here taken as an index of the way in which desire, exasperated by the unsatisfying immediacy of its nominal fulfillment in the here-and-now, seeks perpetually to transcend itself, and to project the mirage and the "beyond" of a fuller imaginary satisfaction upon the horizon and beyond the "reality" of its sheerly physical enactment. (167)

Even more suggestive for our analysis of "Metamorphosis" is the link Jameson makes with the death wish, defined by Freud as "an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things":

> It must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If . . . everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic again—then we shall be com-

> pelled to say that *"the aim of all life is death"* and, looking backwards, that *"inanimate things existed before living ones"*. . . . For a long time, perhaps, living substance was thus being constantly created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still living substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *detours* before reaching its aim of death.[9]

Jameson here shifts the emphasis from death to sex, seeing the ultimate aim of the death wish Thanatos not so much as physical death as the "radical extinction of sexual desire itself" (169). Thus, in "Metamorphosis" too, the strong urge to escape the "trials and tribulations" of sexuality, including rape and incest, leads first to a physical death by drowning and subsequently to an imagined second death involving the return to an "old state of things," in which the living being (Suwa-fish) aims toward inanimateness and an inorganic state ("a dead leaf").

In Jameson's discussion of Lewis and Sade, desire appears as an unrepentant negative, its object unrestrained sex, violence, or death. Yet "Metamorphosis" suggests that the same analysis could apply to that other goal of desire—love, affection, and communication with the Other. Here, too, the impossibility of realizing a satisfying communion is rendered by imaginary displacements. Unlike Sade, who projects sexual violence as pure metaphysical desire, in "Metamorphosis" the incestuous rape occurs after an incipient rebellion on the part of the daughter-victim. That rebellion itself, however, was an expression of desire for a fuller communion, for a living human connection. As with Jameson's reading of Freud, in this instance too, the aim of extinguishing (satisfying) that desire ends up as "the extinction of the subject itself" (169). This dynamic leads in turn, as in the watery world of "Metamorphosis," to the "projection of another, and radically different, space in which the implacable demand of the death wish for some total and ultimate satisfaction, manifestly unavailable in the everyday 'real' world of Eros, may finally be met" (169). Moreover, the dissatisfaction of the author—in Jameson's case, Sade—with his own textual representation leads to his fictional character Saint-Fond, in *L'Histoire de Juliette*, "reproducing Sade's dissatisfaction within his own reality (now Sade's representation)" and "open[ing] up a text beyond the text itself, a textual 'beyond' or afterlife in which ultimate, transcendent satisfaction is to be imagined" (170).

To be sure, Dazai's story appears too simple to lend itself to such convoluted renderings of representation, and yet these reflections on Saint-Fond's "second death," which "marks Sade's episode as autoreferential" by "reproducing within the representation itself Sade's own relationship to it" (170), suggest a new way of understanding this otherwise perplex-

ing episode of "second suicide" in "Metamorphosis." Where Saint-Fond seeks to prolong his victim's suffering and physical death "beyond the very limits of eternity" (166), however, Dazai's drowning fish projects a "transcendent realm beyond its own material remains, in order there the more surely to die a second time" (171). What interests us here is the open-ended textuality that must result from the author's attempts to represent death. As almost an epigraph to Dazai's subsequent life of narrative endeavor, we may quote Jameson's description of the operative dynamic of such texts: "[T]he figure you kill is already imaginary, so that for this first-level representation a second must be substituted—an imaginary of the Imaginary itself—and for that second one, yet another, and so forth, in a regression which has no end" (170).

## Suicidal Signifiers

Not a few critics have called attention to the subversive nature of allegory, whether focusing on overtly socio-political, psychological, or more elusive rhetorical categories. Probably few have done so, however, as radically as has Paul de Man in his *Allegories of Reading* or in essays such as "Shelley Disfigured," in which he asserts with "rigor" and "lucidity" that only an open-ended allegorical process of the kind he perceives in Shelley's unfinished poem *The Triumph of Life* can avoid the critical pitfalls of "the recuperative and nihilistic allegories of historicism."[10]

Much like the case of the poet Shelley, whose accidental drowning could not be dissociated from the intertextual fabric of his unfinished "fragmented" poem, *The Triumph of Life*, Dazai's dramatic death by drowning in yet another (his fifth) suspicious suicide attempt at the peak of his flamboyant career also led to his corpse being critically "transformed into [a] historical and aesthetic object." And as with Shelley's and "all the other dead bodies that appear in romantic literature," so might Paul de Man's words apply to the corpse and literary corpus of Dazai and other Japanese romantics: "What we have done [is] to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves. They have been made into statues for the benefit of future archeologists 'digging in the ground for the new foundations' of their own monuments."[11] In the case of Dazai's death at a critical juncture of the postwar period, we have a prime example of critical efforts toward "the recuperative and nihilistic allegories of historicism," for Dazai's negativity was almost immediately enshrined (via the collaborative dynamic of the mass media and the Japanese literary establishment) as a naturalized component of the postwar literary scene under the American Occupation.

One may also, as we do here, read Dazai's texts as seeking to subvert attempts to impose coherent meaning. Many of the apparent paradoxes

of his texts, whether conflicting accounts of supposedly autobiographical truths, or the problematic ending of "Metamorphosis" involving the apparent "second suicide," may be seen as efforts to resist a sense of imminent closure. The second death of the metamorphosed girl-fish Suwa, after disillusionment with her "utopian" escape from a repressive human existence, amounts moreover to a rejection not only of a personal allegory (the writer's life) and a political allegory (repression/freedom), but also of a utopian interpretation of the kind that would allow integration into a unified and intelligible scheme of reading. Dazai's rejection of the alternative ending allows him to maintain the negativity intact, to disallow any facile naturalization of his text as a modern retelling of Ueda's Buddhist parable and its postulation of a more conventional allegorical theme.

The "antiallegorical" stance of Dazai's text suggests rather the type of open-endedness that de Man sees in Shelley's text as a result of its unintended fragmentation. It is in this sense that "Metamorphosis" reveals the paradoxical aspect of allegory as a revelation of the impossibility of meaning. The "failure" of Dazai's "scheme" refers to more than a transparent allegory of an "impossible freedom." As the fish seeking to drown in water, it posits the undermining of the very medium of its own existence, which is the language of literature. But, as the fish metaphor also suggests, even the freedom to escape, to "laugh at one's oppressors" from a "safe haven," is an illusion because the conditions of oppression are the medium itself. Fish and water, language and meaning—there is no getting outside their totality. There is no escaping the prison of language.

Dazai's strategy, then, is to call attention to the suicidal nature of the signifier, that metaphor which sacrifices itself in order to give life to the signified, whose own essence turns out to be no less metaphorical than its signifier's and hence as inevitably suicidal. Suwa's oppression (resulting as much from lack of communication as from verbal and physical abuse) makes her, via the story of Hachirō and Saburō, aspire to read herself as less than human, or nonhuman. Thus does she become another form of meaning, a fish, and aspire to yet another form of existence, which is ultimately that nonexistence itself metaphorically represented as the space, gap, or aporia between the signifier and the signified. But that space, represented by water here, is both separation and connection, and as such (sub)merges and sustains (buoys up) the distinction. The paradoxical nature of desire/meaning is here conveyed as requiring that distance, gap, aporia in order to exist in the first place. Complete absorption, identity, indifference would negate desire and the quest for meaning.

It is with this perception that Dazai will also incorporate into his autobiographical writing an aporetic quality, a distance between narrator and subject that persistently calls attention to the tenuous and metaphorical nature of his enterprise. And as his persona takes on, through criti-

cism and journalism, its own allegorical hue, his work demonstrates the impossibility of reading him (both his writing and his life) as a predetermined signified.

Allegory for Dazai thus involved an intimate questioning not only of his life and goals, his involvement with society, politics, and women, but also of the role and function of literature. Up until this period of 1933, he had written a series of works in the socialist realist vein, texts designed to further the abstract idealized notion of class struggle with which he romantically identified as a disaffected, alienated member of Japan's ruling class. Dazai's personal dilemma, internalized as an ironic melancholy over his incapacity to change his class role (whereby he rationalized his suicide attempts as his contribution to the "perishing of the ruling class"), merged with his romantic nostalgia for a bohemian literary life-style. Yet his turn to a literature of negativity and decadence was at the same time a recognition of the abstract and intellectual nature of the Japanese left, one of the reasons for its easy dismantlement. The ending to "Metamorphosis" presages the type of narrative strategy that became characteristic of Dazai's later works. It suggests a tentative rejection of utopian solutions of the type he associated with Japanese Marxists as well as of the romantic idealizations of his early period. Embracing allegory as a metaphor of resistance was to recognize the impossibility of meaning not in absolute terms but in a Japan unable to liberate itself from the oppression of political rhetoric. Utopian schemes might have their place in a future world, when art might realize a revolutionary function. But for the time being, art was but the fragrance of a flower and the artist but the "snout of a pig" able to sniff at it.[12]

## Seamy Suicide: Threading the "I"

As de Man's analogy between archeologist and critic suggests, the critic seeks to dig up and resurrect the body (corpus) of the author. Writing is thus a process of "disinterring" from the crypt of the text and "revitalizing" those signs of meaning. But it is particularly apt in the case of Dazai, whose text, narrative structure, and language continuously call attention to the process of burial or repression inherent in writing and textuality itself. For Dazai, writing about death and suicide becomes a lifelong "undertaking" in which writing and death are inextricably merged while the very conditions giving rise to writing/dying are themselves submerged in the text. The opening fragment of Dazai's early work "Leaves" encapsulates this process:

> I planned to die. In January I received a New Year's gift of a gray-striped robe. It was clearly a summer kimono. I thought I might as well go on living until summer.[13]

The casual tone here, or what Miyoshi calls "insouciance,"[14] belies the process of "suicidal narration" that is Dazai's project. The above statement is in fact a narrative sandwiched within a narrative, with no apparent or organic connection between the two. The decision to die is displaced by the decision not to die, with as little causal or logical sequence as that between a trivial gift and a life-and-death decision. Yet it is the gap, the space, the *absence* of logic that is the issue here. It is that which is not and cannot be expressed that structures the experience of textuality. It is not the "voice" of Dazai so much as it is the impossibility of determining voice, intention, and meaning.

This brief, evocative passage, also written in 1933, may be seen in retrospect to announce Dazai's subsequent career as a writer. The idea, the act, the story of suicide, punctuates his life and writing up until that summer some fifteen years later when his own ambiguous death, labeled "suicide," marks an end as arbitrary and incon*sequential* as this initial narrative *sequence*. Dazai's professional writing career thus begins with a brief narrative, the opening fragment of "Leaves," in which the intention to die is displaced and deferred by a seemingly insignificant and irrelevant reflection on a piece of woven cloth. His life and writing are subsequently shaped by a series of suicide attempts, culminating in his double suicide death with Yamazaki Tomie in 1948. These "textualizations" of suicide and death come to constitute, as it were, the warp and woof of Dazai's autobiographical and literary corpus.[15] Dazai's string of failed suicides raises suspicions about his intentions, suspicions that serve, however, to call attention to the process of writing itself in Dazai's literature. The notion of "seam," enhanced by several morphological and harmonic affiliations (seamy, seem, seme), will provide us with a suggestive framework for considering suicidal narrativity.

The association of weaving with seeding, along with that of semen and semantics, is well developed in Derrida's *Dissemination*.[16] The Anglo-Saxon word "seam," however, fits well with Dazai's interweaving of life and writing. For the seam would appear, like various examples of Derrida's nonbinary logic—those "undecidable" terms, the pharmakon, the supplement, the hymen—to signal a "neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either/or."[17] The analogy here in Dazai's "Leaves" is between writing and weaving: the product, both text and kimono, may be realized only through a process of writing/sewing that achieves a semblance of coherence or meaning by stitching together fragments of meaning/fabric into an apparent (seeming) whole. That this coherent whole is no more than a fabric-ation or a fiction is apparent from its "seams," those points of suture or juncture where a text, like a piece of clothing, may also, conversely, most easily be undone, or risk "coming apart at the seams." There is here, then, a triple anagrammatic play, for what *seems* to constitute a *seme* (meaning) does so, provisionally, by virtue of its *seams*. The

same seam that joins and constitutes meaning is simultaneously the means of undoing the whole. Thus the verb seam, which initially means to join, by sewing together, two pieces of material, comes in a secondary instance to refer to the *mark* of that joining: the fold line, groove, ridge, interstice. And, in a third instance, it comes to mean the making of a seam where none previously existed: to line, cut, scar, wrinkle, furrow, or to become fissured or ridgy, to crack open. The ultimate extension of "seam" would be purling, where stitches are inverted to create the impression of a seam, to give a material a ribbed appearance for decorative effect. This spectrum of meanings emphasizes the impossibility of deciding whether the seam is that which holds material together or that which allows it to come apart, whether it is that which hides the provisional nature of joining or that which reveals it. The derivative adjective "seamy," in its literal sense referring to the rough seams of the underside of a garment, takes on the figurative sense of the "underside" of social life, that which is judged, from the confines of respectability, to be unpleasant, disreputable, or unpresentable.

In thematic terms, Dazai may be, and has been, reduced to a writer who pits an individual, alienated, and weak self against a strong, cold, and brutal society. Yet it is insufficient to see a mere static opposition between self and society here, for Dazai's writing, both overtly and implicitly, calls attention repeatedly to a process of slipping and sliding that belies any such transparent reduction. One of the ways in which this self-referentiality occurs is in the recognition of a necessity for opposition, antithesis, oppression, and friction in order for there to be resistance, revolt, and movement. Another is in the often discordant and abrupt intrusions of narrative or authorial voice that rupture (or suture) the text. This seaming of the authorial "I" looking at its autobiographical self suggests a convoluted self-referentiality rendered all the more intricate by its ironic twist, or inversion, of the private and public spheres. As a reading of "Reminiscences" demonstrates, the ethics of society are no more than decorative seams to conceal a vast apparatus of oppression.

The Japanese word for "seam," which we have not yet mentioned, is no less appropriate to Dazai's text: *nuime* from *nuu* (sew, stitch) and *me*, literally "eye" and, in a series of extended meanings, mesh, stitch, weave, texture, as well as the eye of a needle. The fabric of Dazai's text is constituted by a series of poorly sewn stitches or "eyes" (inserting the presence of the first-person "I" of the narrator-author) focused on the uneven, unseemly seams of the narrator's past. The rough or coarse (*me no arai*) texture of the discourse, however, is there to call attention to itself. Masao Miyoshi has argued, "If Dazai's art were no more than a cloak of rags to be torn away to disclose the truth, his work would prove quite tedious at the end, being merely the redundant self-analysis of a

seedy self-indulgent individual."[18] Indeed, however, Dazai's text seeks to show itself as a cloak of rags and *no more*, and to portray a seedy, self-indulgent individual and *no more*. It is the idea of a different, or a single, ultimate truth, of a more presentable individual, a more authentic author that would jeopardize Dazai's writing.

Thus Dazai's project is avowedly to reveal the "seamy" side of his own "self." "Reminiscences," the longest piece in his first published collection *Declining Years*, has as its stated intent to "lay bare my evil," to "confess the existence of this wicked child." The contingent and relative nature of this evil, as of his childhood and later life, however, has the effect of revealing the undecidable nature of the seam. As intimated in "Leaves," his project is to integrate his life, that striped cloth of past, present, and future, into a text that will be of no use as soon as it is completed. The provisionality of the writing is identified here with Dazai's decision to await the summer "because" his kimono is intended (by social convention) for summer wear. Once summer comes, there will no longer be any reason to wait: both writing and kimono, as pretext and pre-text, to paraphrase Derrida's opening to his *Hors Livre*, "will (therefore) not have been."[19]

The collection *Declining Years*, which contains both "Metamorphosis" and "Reminiscences," begins, then, with this intonation of intention to die, already rendered suspect by the medium of its message. Its title, *Bannen*, also rendered "twilight years" or "later years," invokes a premature old age as an ironic ground to the melodic theme of failed suicides. The string of suicides stitched together from *Declining Years* (1936) through *No Longer Human* (1948) form a seam whose undecidability is both the sine qua non of Dazai as monument of negativity and the means whereby Dazai's writing effects a radical undermining of the Japanese autobiographical fiction tradition.

*Declining Years* begins the process of turning the autobiographical I-novel, with its assumption of a hidden but true self, inside out. It is not just, as Usui Yoshimi suggests, that Dazai combines the third person "he" (*kare*) of the objective novel (*kyakkan shōsetsu*) with the "I" (*watakushi*) of the I-novel in an effort to merge the undesirable extremes of majestic omniscience in the former and distorting banality in the latter.[20] It is rather a textual effect of the desire to become a "living dead." It is not so much a matter, as Ōmori Morikazu puts it, of transforming a "loss of humanity" (*ningen shikkaku*) into a "human divinity" (*ningen shinkaku*), but rather a distancing of self from life through a textuality of death.[21] In Dazai's words, "I am now not a person, but that strange creature known as an artist. I should like to introduce you to this great author who has dragged his corpse behind him for sixty years. Not that there is any point in trying to penetrate the mysteries of this cadaver's sentences."[22] The

point is not, in other words, to substitute a transcendental truth—be it private and personal or public and national (via the emperor as god)—for an immanent one in an attempt to compensate for the instability of the latter. Rather, it is an attempt to undo the oppositional logic itself by radically questioning the assumptions on which it is based. Thus it is that Dazai's writing is filled with monsters, ghosts, but above all human paradoxes, created by a self-referential language conveyed through a disembodied narrative voice. Thus it is that the reader is cajoled into seeing the "no longer human" ghostly persona of Dazai as "all too human."

## Solitary Sumo: Dazai's "Reminiscences"

"Reminiscences" constitutes Dazai's earliest attempt to "thread the 'I' " of his narrative needle. The self-referential quality of this early work of autobiographical fiction is colorfully conveyed by Kamei Katsuichirō's description of it as "solitary sumo" (*hitorizumō*).[23] A Japanese equivalent of "quixotic" or "fighting windmills," the term is used by Kamei in reference to the narrator's one-sided love fantasy with Miyo, a young servant girl. But the concern of the text with writing, autobiography, and lineage makes it a suggestive description of the self-referentiality of the narrative itself.

"Reminiscences," taken as a unitary text, would appear to be a paradigmatic example of romantic autobiography depicting an "authentic self in constant danger of alienation."[24] Consider, for instance, Okuno Takeo's depiction of it as "an unusual way of writing about one's adolescence":

> Along with innocence growing up, there is the direct expression of a perhaps dulled and chaotic passivity, lapsing neither into sentimentality nor into self-degradation. . . . The important elements of Dazai's literature are here: secret feelings of inferiority, the elite awareness of having to be better than the masses, a feeling of alienation from family and friends, desperate buffoonery, weakness, compassion for the oppressed, formation of a private world, and a sense of destiny.[25]

It is only in the perspective of Dazai's collective text of *Declining Years* and later works up to and including *No Longer Human* that the deconstructive nature of his project becomes apparent, as does the death tapestry Dazai has woven around, or seamed into, "Reminiscences" by preceding it with "Leaves." Ultimately, and throughout his writing, Dazai returns to a preoccupation with birth and death as "the only true facts," and hence "not susceptible to human interpretation." Beneath the antitranscendental urgency of this deceptively transparent statement lies an appeal to conceive of a state in which interpretation does not function. This state is located at the borders of human existence, prior to birth and

posterior to death, with the nonconsciousness imputed to it marked by those flags of birth and death. The "truth" of these facts, then, is not due to a superior interpretation or capacity to interpret; rather, it is due to their very immanence and the impossibility, for the individual at those instants prior and posterior to, of giving meaning to them.

Between and against these "facts" lies the terrain of life and consciously perceived reality. Unlike the "facts" of nonconscious nonbeing, which can only be hinted at and never described, the content of life "between the facts" is associated with a physical body and self-aware consciousness. As such, it cannot escape the burden of interpretation, which in turn entails an endless succession of signifiers, all pointing to an ultimate signified. Interpretation cannot be avoided, but it can be undone or shown to be untenable. Dazai's autobiographical writing points to this disjunction of signifier and signified by constituting a "life" whose coherence depends on a series of "deaths." It is through the seams of this life that the abyss of nonconscious truth, where signifier and signified are both one and nothing, is glimpsed. Suicide in Dazai's texts will come to function as the ultimate sliding signifier, whose instability reveals the absence of any signified.

In "Reminiscences," which was to have been a "posthumous letter," suicide is only extratextually invoked. Having engineered his own alienation from humanity ("I was of no use to anyone . . . even my one and only Hatsuyo"), he was resolved to die: "Once again I planned to die. . . . I had absolutely nothing to go on living for." But still he needed a justification, and he chose his perennial "role" as a member of the "doomed" class: "I would faithfully play the tragic, cowardly role assigned me by fate."[26] If suicide is not prominent in "Reminiscences," however, death is tangentially invoked through an account of the narrator's father's death:

> That spring, while the snow still covered the ground, my father died of a hemorrhage at a Tokyo hospital. The local newspapers put out a special edition announcing his death. I was excited more by the publicity than by the fact of his death. My name also appeared in the papers together with the names of nobility. Father's body came home by sled in a big coffin. I went out to the neighboring village to meet it along with a large group of people. . . . When I saw it emerging from the woods I thought it was beautiful. The next day, the family gathered in the room where the coffin had been laid. When the lid was raised, everyone began crying. Father looked like he was asleep. . . . Hearing everyone cry, I began to cry too.[27]

One is reminded here of Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (*L'Etranger*), in which the narrator-protagonist Meursault's opening lines recounting his mother's death ("Mother died today. Or, maybe yesterday; I can't be

sure.") appear to be as significant in condemning him for murder as the act itself.[28] As Camus himself suggests, Meursault is condemned because he refuses to play by the rules of the game.[29] What we have here with the narrator of "Reminiscences" is, to the contrary, a brutally honest admission of how a child can play the rules of the game without sincerity, without "truth."

It is also of course possible to read the child's (and Meursault's) "alienation" in terms of that more familiar assumption that " 'real' death is for all of us rigorously unimaginable."[30] In this perspective, the matter of death becomes in essence a problem of "personality," for which there are narrative questions and answers, with the qualification: "[I]t being understood that the question is in fact unanswerable and that the narrative " 'answer' is in reality a kind of sleight of hand."[31] Thus, for example, in the case of Meursault, the unrelated events of his life occurring between his mother's death and the murder are presented at his trial "in a logically organized whole as the basis of an interpretation of Meursault's personality."[32]

And with Dazai, this instance of brutal honesty becomes possible through the "memory" of childhood naiveté and its collaboration in the fabrication of emotion. Crying is the accepted way of masking the "unanswerable," which the child learns to do. In terms of Dazai's narrative development, it provides a decided contrast—as a hypothetical closure, replete with death and burial, coffin and mourning—to Dazai's string of ambiguous narrative deaths and suicides.

But Dazai is also an accomplice in the construction of a particular personality. For all his insistence on revealing his own "evil" side, his account here, as throughout his autobiographical narratives, develops the portrait of a helpless child buffeted by the cruel world of adults. Critics like Okuno read "Reminiscences" literally as a "confession," seeing Dazai's narrative as an ethical act, an attempt to turn his "example" into a warning to others. Dazai portrayed it as the verification of the presence of evil within himself, after which (self-)execution would be legitimate. Yet in the process, his attribution of evil to his individual self seemed to be contested by a notion of social and institutional evil.

Thus does "Reminiscences" begin with several recollections by Dazai of himself at an early age in the company of his aunt, followed by the less than innocent observation: "I have several recollections of my aunt but unfortunately not a single memory of my mother and father at that time." To be sure, the narrative then, in accordance with his stated intent of "laying bare my evil life," begins to suggest perversity in the nature of this child. Even with his doting aunt, he deliberately feigns ignorance to make himself amusing, and in another instance causes her distress and humiliation as she trips over herself running to see what he is crying

about during their visit to a waterfall. Another recollection involves a dream that he had while living with his aunt, evoking a child abandoned by his parents and living in nightmarish fear of rejection by the only person he sees as a source of affection—an image hardly likely to evoke a reader's antipathies.

> One night I dreamed that my aunt was leaving the house, abandoning me. Her chest blocked the entire doorway. Beads of sweat trickled down her large, swollen red breasts. She spat at me: "I've had enough of you." I pushed my face between her breasts, sobbing and pleading with her not to leave me. When I awoke from my dream, shaken awake by my aunt, I found myself on my bed in tears, with my face against her bosom. Even after I was completely awake, I remained sad and cried quietly for a long while.[33]

The year preceding elementary school had also seen Dazai's separation from his aunt Kie, who, benefiting from the marriage of her daughter to a successful dentist, moved away with her family to set up house. Dazai originally went off with them, a move that had resulted in further insecurity for him about his true status in the family.

> It was during the winter. I was crouched in a corner of the sled with my aunt. Just as the sled was about to depart, my brother called me an "adopted son" and poked me in the rear through the sled's awning. I clenched my teeth and suffered the insult. I was convinced I had been adopted by my aunt, but when it came time to enter school, I was sent back home. (15)

It is from this school period that further revelations of "evil" are disclosed. "Once I began school, I was no longer a child." Developing an adult personality meant learning to lie. "The fact is that whenever I wrote the truth in a composition something bad always happened" (16). One instance of "truth"—writing in a composition that he did not love his father—led to his being called to account by the school authorities. The child who desired passionately to be considered a good student, "to be acclaimed by everybody," found he had to cheat and lie not only to show that he was bright and worthy, but to prove his "legitimacy" in his own family. At the same time, however, he felt a need to "delegitimize" his family, by insisting to his teachers that his father was "not human like everyone else."

> My father was an extremely busy man, and was not at home very often. Even when he was at home, he didn't spend much time with his children. I was afraid of this father of mine. . . . Once when my younger brother and I were playing in the storeroom among the stacks of rice-sacks, my father appeared in the doorway and yelled at us to get out. Even now I feel uneasy recalling

my fright before his huge coal-black silhouette against the sunlight at his back. (17)

As for his mother, "I was not close to [her] either. I was weaned by a wet-nurse and grew up in the care of my aunt, so that until my third year of school I didn't even recognize [my own mother]" (17). All in all, there is material here to construct the prototypical romantic figure, the neglected child and anguished artist, and "Reminiscences" is very much a text in that genre. Given that Dazai took to heart his mentor Ibuse Masuji's advice to read such writers as Pushkin, Chekhov, and Proust, it is not surprising that he then earned Ibuse's praise ("first-rate in execution")[34] for the Chekhov-inspired "Reminiscences," which featured such passages as the following:

I was a flower petal being blown about, quivering at the slightest gust of wind. I agonized over the most trivial insult, to the point of wanting to die. . . . I saw myself surely headed for fame and greatness; but if I was unable to ignore adult contempt for the sake of my honor, how would I be able to avoid the fatal effects of disgracefully flunking out. . . . I felt the presence of a hundred invisible enemies and remained extremely cautious. (25)

As Jameson suggests for Wyndham Lewis, the fact that representations of death turn out to be narrative displacements of a complex and symbolic nature is related to the problem of personality wherein Lewis as satirist seeks to absolve himself of responsibility for his fictional victims' deaths. The paradox ensues from Lewis's ideological belief in the value of personality and the consequent need for death to be "real," as only in this way can the "strong personality" be said to exist. To create fictional characters whose lives are unreal allows for deaths that are equally unreal, and hence do not count. What we see in Dazai, from his very beginnings as a writer, is an effort to create not necessarily a "strong" personality but a "real" personality, and to do so by means of revealing the often inconsistent and contradictory nature of narrative construction of the personality. "Metamorphosis" reveals the uncertainty, the striving in the direction of a strong personality, but it succumbs to a sense of disbelief in the possibility of that personality's extinction. At this level, it is an attempt to absolve the narrator of responsibility for the death of both his creation and his victim.

The actual incident involving Dazai and the drowning death of a barmaid, which serves as partial context for "Metamorphosis," becomes a fascinating source of narrative manipulation, evoking again Dazai's paradox of self-condemnation and desire to be free of guilt. Donald Keene points out how Dazai's multiple and repeated versions of this incident differ from each other in significant detail and observes that Dazai "seems

to have been unable, ever since he was a child, to tell the unadorned truth."[35] If, however, one reads Dazai's series of dialogues with his "victim[s]" and the contradictory accounts of death as an acknowledgment of the impossibility of narrating the truth in the first place, they become paradoxically an affirmation of the reality of both the incident and the personality of the narrator. Similarly, it may be argued, the way in which a writer and a subject establish their own reality (and hence the possibility of their own real death) is not by constructing a coherent "strong" personality, but rather by projecting a fragmented, contradictory subject.

In this way, there is an important link beween Dazai's imaginary and autobiographical fiction. The latter is ostensibly an attempt to reconstitute the past through memory, although what makes Dazai's efforts so different from those of the Japanese I-novelist is precisely this conception of memory as itself a fabrication. Thus it is helpful to see Dazai's "Reminiscences" in conjunction with "Metamorphosis." Each is in its own way a complex displacement of representations of death, incorporating the textual construction of a personality and initiating an open-ended narrative of repeated displacements of death. In the stitching of Dazai's autobiographical fiction, these meditations on death and suicide recur in the fabric and in the seams. Let us briefly consider several instances of "Reminiscences" involving the establishment of personality in conjunction with the reality of death.

The narrative of "Reminiscences" relies predominantly on a series of self-referential devices to question its signifier status. These include the undecidability of birth, love, ideology, and writing, as reflected in the narrator's doubts about his being the son of his parents, about the response of Miyo to his silent "love," about the servants' inability to grasp and practice "democracy," and about the status of literature as a resolution to one's psychological and social dilemmas. In each instance, the narrator manipulates the signifier in question to conform to a paradigmatic figure, that of the alienated, outcast poet, suggesting that "Reminiscences" is as much a portrait of the author's "present" consciousness as it is a story of his "past." The ultimate discovery of "infidelity" on the part of Miyo and the narrator's "disillusionment" are paralleled in the author-Dazai's actual relationship with Hatsuyo.

Let us consider several of these textual nodes in "Reminiscences" in order to see how the metaphor of "second death" generates a series of displacements for romantic and sexual insecurity in tandem with political uncertainties in Japan of the 1930s. In the next chapter we will explore the notion of survival (resistance to death) in Dazai's personal life in its political representation as defection (*tenkō*), which in turn acts as a metaphor for literary suicide or *littératuricide*.

First we may note, with Dazai's snide smile in the background, that

his story of unrequited love for a servant girl Miyo is not as innocent as it appears. It is the narrator, after all, who makes clear his own strong sense of class consciousness here, imposing itself on his romantic fantasies. Then a literary experience, of a distinctively European cast, revives his waning passion. He reads Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin.*

> It was based on the true experience of a woman prisoner whose mistake had been allowing herself to be seduced by a university student, the aristocratic nephew of her husband. Oblivious to the larger meaning of the novel, I inserted a dead leaf as a marker in the page where the two lovers exchanged their first kiss under the scattering lilac petals. I was incapable of reading an absorbing novel without getting involved, and in this case I was painfully aware of the resemblance between these two lovers and Miyo and myself. If I could just be a little bit bolder, I should be like this aristocrat. The mere thought was enough to remind me of my cowardice. . . . I felt I wanted to become a brilliant sufferer in life. (34)

After reading Pushkin, Dazai reveals to his brother that his secret love is Miyo. His brother startles him by asking whether he intends to marry her. Marriage? The thought had never occurred to him. When his brother suggests that it probably will not be possible because of family opposition, he peevishly draws his brother into a fight, but they soon laugh and make up. Dazai's friends are more accommodating, quick to bolster his imagination with schemes and machinations for conquering Miyo's heart. During summer vacation, Dazai pressures two friends into accompanying him home, ostensibly to study for high school entrance exams, but "also with the idea of showing Miyo" to them. The situation prompts a certain uneasiness on his part about questions of class status.

> I prayed that my friends would not seem disreputable to my family. My elder brothers' friends were all young men from noted, if provincial, families. They didn't wear coats with just two brass buttons like my friends did. (35)

> I was troubled by the notion of mediocrity. Since the business with Miyo had begun, wasn't I acting like a fool? Anyone can be in love with a woman, but my love is different. It isn't so simple; my situation is not low-class. (38)

Dazai arrives home for his last vacation before graduation from middle school only to find that Miyo has been seduced by a male servant and sent away. Thus Miyo's pure image has been thoroughly tarnished and the narrator's sense of betrayal by women and servants reinforced. Implicit here already is the theory of *ressentiment* (whereby working-class anger becomes the "explanation" for revolt), for Miyo is described by brother Eiji as having been "really headstrong" and having "had a fight

with grandmother." The bourgeoisie here imputes to the rebellious attitude of the servant class a motivation of resentment. We shall see how this theory operates in Dazai's postwar writing in Chapter Eight, but here we note Dazai's admixture of romantic fantasy and its denouement. The matter is, however, even more explicit in an earlier section in which the precocious protagonist instructs the servants in "democratic ideas."

> Around my fourth or fifth year of elementary school I had learned from my brother (Keiji) about the idea of "democracy." I also heard my mother complaining to some visitors that it was because of democracy that taxes were going up so much, that almost all the rice production was being stolen by taxes. I was pretty confused and unsure of its meaning. Later on that summer I decided to help the servants with the grass-cutting in the garden, and in the winter I gave them a hand removing the snow from the roof, and while doing all this, I instructed them in democratic ideas. After a while I realized that the servants weren't all that happy with my help. Apparently they had to redo the sections I had done. (27–28)

The portrait of the young aristocrat seeking to "declass" himself by contributing to the democratic movement of history, although a vignette here, was in fact an obsession for Dazai while he was writing "Reminiscences." In the next chapter, we will examine the nexus between his political involvement, his romantic failures, and his suicide attempts through the autobiographical fiction he wrote several years later about this period. In this manner, we see his posthumous writing growing and expanding rather than marking the end or closure that Dazai intimated they would. Instead, Dazai was embarked on a narrative that would take him through some of the most turbulent years of Japan's twentieth century.

PART THREE

# Japanese *Littératuricide* and Postwar Rebirth

The Japanese people were shaken, but also enlightened and purified. . . . He wanted to die, and moreover to die of his own free will: his self-consciousness sought thereby to align itself with the consciousness of past centuries. . . . A life came to an end, bringing to an end the history of which it was the issue. In the brief and bloody splendor of this setting sun was reignited, and extinguished, the Japanese tradition of willful death.

—Maurice Pinguet, *La mort volontaire au Japan*

The revolution is far from taking place. It needs more, many more valuable, unfortunate victims.

—Kazuko in *The Setting Sun*

## *Chapter Six*

# DEATHSCRIPT: SUICIDE AS POLITICAL SURVIVAL

Isn't the song of a man condemned to die—
isn't that something like literature?
—Dazai Osamu, "Song of Defeat"

DAZAI'S suicidal narrative becomes increasingly intertwined with the vicissitudes of the political left in Japan in the early 1930s. The autobiographical nexus, wherein the events of his life serve both directly and indirectly as the source if not the very medium of his writing, comes to be defined more and more by an association of love, politics, literature, and death. Dazai's autobiographical writing becomes almost convoluted in its effort to account for its own genesis. Thus, where the early "Reminiscences" sought to account for the "evil" of the subject-author himself, a later work, "Eight Views of Tokyo" (1940), focuses on the desperate and death-obsessed process leading to his first published work (containing "Reminiscences"), a collection titled *Declining Years* (*Bannen*), whose very title and conception anticipated a posthumous publication.[1]

Both Dazai and his writing of course survived, although the process involved several failed suicides, drug addiction and hospitalization, abortive love affairs and friendships, professional disappointment, the destruction of painfully produced manuscripts, and an ambiguous involvement in and defection from left-wing political activities. Although all of these will be touched on in the following pages, we will focus on the relation between suicide, politics, and narrative. I will draw especially on Rimbaud's notion of *littératuricide*, symbolic or literary suicide, as a form of survival and will suggest that it may be helpful in understanding the Japanese phenomenon of *tenkō* or political apostasy, in which the individual achieves survival but only at the cost of sacrificing some essential part of his or her being.

In order to appreciate better these developments amidst the tumultuous events of Dazai's life and in Japan of the 1930s, we will begin with Dazai's own account of these years. In the succeeding chapters, Dazai's narrative of suicidal autobiography will be analyzed as it reaches its final years of the late 1940s.

## Writing Love and Revolution

I arranged all the passion of my life in this one volume.
—Dazai Osamu, "Standard-Bearer
of the Twentieth Century"

When Dazai arrived in Tokyo in 1930 at the age of twenty-one, he had already been writing for several years; he had begun a relationship with a young geisha from Aomori; he had been considerably influenced by currents of Marxist thought; and he had already tried to commit suicide at least once. It was the turmoil of the next few years, however, that produced the collection *Declining Years*. Between 1930 and 1936, Dazai changed living quarters seventeen times; he was married, "betrayed" by his wife, separated, divorced, and in 1939 married a second time; he was active in illegal left-wing activities, for which he was arrested several times, finally giving himself up and renouncing political action; he attempted suicide several times, one incident involving the death of a bar hostess; he suffered poor health, underwent an appendix operation, the aftereffects of which led him to drug addiction; he flunked out of Tokyo University; and he produced hundreds of pages of writing, some of which launched him to public renown and candidacy for a major literary award, the first Akutagawa Prize, in 1935. "Eight Views of Tokyo" (*Tōkyō Hakkei*), written in 1940, is Dazai's record of his life from 1930 to 1940. The following discussion summarizes and translates selectively the part of this work dealing with the years 1930–1933, the period when he wrote *Declining Years*.[2]

After graduating from high school in Hirosaki in March of 1930, Dazai went to Tokyo and entered the French literature department of Tokyo Imperial University. He took a room in Tozuka, not far from where his brother Keiji was living. Three months later, Keiji died of an illness at age twenty-six. During this same period, Dazai lost other members of his family, a circumstance that did not help to alleviate his increasing sense of isolation and alienation in his new urban environment.

By the second semester, Dazai indicates that he had stopped attending classes, instead spending his time "calmly assisting in that undercover work people were so afraid of. . . . During that period, I was a purely political person" (146). It was also during that autumn of 1930 that Oyama Hatsuyo, a young geisha whom Dazai had met while in high school, came from Aomori to live with him in Tokyo.

> She was an innocent geisha. I rented a room for her in Honjo. . . . Up to that time, we had had no physical relations at all. Then my oldest brother [Bunji] came down from home because of her. Two brothers who had lost their father seven years earlier met face to face in that gloomy boarding

house in Tozuka. Confronted with the radically changing attitude of a younger brother, the older brother cried. On the firm condition that I be permitted to marry her, I agreed to entrust the girl to my brother's supervision for the time being. Undoubtedly the older brother taking her away felt many times more anguish than the arrogant younger brother giving her up. The night before she left, I made love to her for the first time. (146)

Aside from one terse letter announcing her safe arrival home, Dazai heard nothing from Hatsuyo. "She seemed incredibly unconcerned. To me this was unjust. It was disgraceful that while I was struggling, shocking all my relations, and even causing my mother hellish suffering, she should be so stupidly arrogant. She should have been writing me a letter at least once a day" (146). In this state of mind, Dazai plunged further into political activity. "From early morning until late at night . . . I refused nothing I was asked to do." In this part of his life, too, however, he began to doubt his ability and usefulness, "suffering even deeper despair." On November 16, 1930, Dazai met Tanabe Shimeko, a Ginza bar hostess.

She liked me. Everyone is liked once in his life, as unwholesome as it may be. I persuaded this woman to drown in the sea with me at Kamakura. When one has failed, I thought, it is time to die. I was even beginning to fail in that ungodly work I was doing. I had undertaken a job that was physically impossible for me, that almost made me want to be called a coward. H. [Hatsuyo] thinks only of her own happiness. . . . It serves me right. . . . The hardest thing for me was to cut myself off from all my relatives. Knowing that my mother, my brother, and my aunt were all thoroughly disgusted with me because of the business with H. was the immediate cause of my throwing myself into the water. The girl died and I survived. I've already written a number of times about her death. It is the black spot of my life. I was detained by the police, but the investigation resulted in a stay of prosecution. (147)

Dazai's brother Bunji was good to his word. He bought Hatsuyo's contract as a geisha and released her. In February of 1931, he sent her to Tokyo, where she (age 19) and Dazai (age 22) were married in a quiet ceremony. They found a place to live in Iida.

Iida was a period of foolishness. I was totally lethargic. I hadn't the slightest wish to start over again. We spent our time entertaining the friends who occasionally came to visit. As for my heinous crime, far from being ashamed of it, I was even slightly proud of it. It was really a period of infamy and imbecility. Naturally, I hardly attended classes either. I despised all effort, spending my days staring stupidly at H. It was idiotic. I did absolutely noth-

ing. Then gradually I began helping out again with the same undercover work as before. But this time I had no passion for it at all. Idle nihilism. (147)

On the move, changing apartments and names to avoid the police, Dazai continued his activities. But he had little to say about it in his writing. Instead, he wrote, he was absorbed in composing haiku poetry: "I was an old man." After each arrest by the police, he would be quickly released and, following his friends' instructions, would move to a new address and carry out new orders. "If it was good for everyone, I'd do it; this was my attitude, utterly devoid of spirit." Married life passed uneventfully, emptily. The couple set up a program for teaching Hatsuyo English, although without much success. During the spring of 1932, Dazai found it necessary to move around even more than before. He changed his name and pretended to be from Hokkaido. "I was really discouraged. I had to be careful with the money I had. . . . I was totally unprepared for the next day. I was incapable of action. From time to time I went to school and lay for hours on the grass in front of the lecture-hall without saying anything" (147).

It was during the summer that Dazai, in talking to an old high school classmate, discovered that Hatsuyo had not been as innocent as he had thought during the time she had remained in Hirosaki. Fortifying himself with beer one hot summer afternoon, he worked himself into an agitated state and confronted her with the story. She denied it, and Dazai let himself be convinced of her sincerity. But the same night, reading Rousseau's *Confessions* and discovering that Rousseau also "suffered" because of his wife's past, Dazai became once more unconvinced of his wife's sincerity.

That night I finally made her spit it out. Everything I'd been told by the student was true. It was even worse. When I probed further, I began to feel there might be no end to it. I quit in the middle. On the matter of infidelity, of course, I certainly didn't have the credentials for blaming someone else. After all, there was the Kamakura incident. But that night my blood was seething with fury. I thought how I had cherished H. like a jewel in the palm of my hand, bragging about her to my friends. I had lived for her sake. I'd naively thought that I had saved a woman who was still pure. Like a man of honor, I had accepted unquestioningly everything she'd said. I had boasted to my friends about how spirited a woman H. was, how she had been able to remain faithful in spite of her circumstances. Was I dumb or what? There were no words to describe it. Idiot child. I didn't know what a woman was. I didn't even have the urge to hate H. for her deceit. I actually felt fondness for her as she confessed to me. I felt like patting her affectionately on the back. It was just too bad for me. I was disgusted. . . . In short, I'd had just about all I could take. I went and gave myself up to the police. (148–149)

After the police investigation, Dazai was released and soon found himself "still alive," again walking the streets of Tokyo. With nowhere else to go, he returned to Hatsuyo, and they enacted a "cowardly and feeble" reunion. They changed living quarters once again, still supported by reluctant remittances from Dazai's family. Hatsuyo seemed in good spirits, as if nothing had happened, but he felt differently.

> I was gradually waking up from the stupor I'd been in for so long. I wrote what I called a "posthumous letter." It was a hundred pages of reminiscences. By now [1940] this "Reminiscences" has turned out to be my maiden work. In it I wanted to lay bare my evil since childhood. That was in the fall of my twenty-third year. Sitting in my lonely room looking out at a large untended field overgrown with weeds, I lost much of my good humor. Once again I planned to die. If it was an affectation, so it was. I was a conceited fellow. I naturally tended to see life as theater. Or rather I saw theater as real life. By this time I was no longer of use to anyone. Even my one and only H. had been soiled by other people's hands. I had absolutely nothing to go on living for. I made up my mind that as one of the unwitting people "doomed to perish," I would die. I would faithfully play the role assigned me by fate: the tragic cowardly role of always yielding to others.
>
> But life is not a drama. No one knows the second act. There are also men who make their entrance in the role of "doomed persons" but who do not get off the stage till the very end. With the intention of writing a small piece to leave behind me, I composed a confession of my childhood and adolescence to show that such a despicable child as this could exist. Unexpectedly, I became intensely involved with this piece of writing; a faint light began to burn in my nothingness. I was unable to die. And then I came to be absolutely dissatisfied with just this one volume of reminiscences. Since I had written this far, I wanted to go on and write everything. I wanted to expose every detail of my life up until that very day. Everything. Things I wanted to write came pouring out. First I wrote about the incident at Kamakura, but it was no good. There was something missing. So I wrote another piece, but was again dissatisfied. I took a deep breath and got started on the next piece. Unable to put a period to it and end it, I just kept stringing small commas together. I was gradually beginning to be devoured by that demon beckoning me to eternity. Straws against the wind. (149–150)

This frantic literary activity continued through 1933, Dazai's twenty-fourth year. Although he should have graduated in March, he did not even bother to take exams. He felt he had betrayed his brothers. "Deceiving those who trust in you is a hell of near madness." He promised to try and graduate for them, but with no better results. "I lived in that hell for the next two years."

> In the process of all this serious reflection, self-ridicule, and panic about my readiness to die, I found myself not dying at all, but devoting myself instead to an egotistical series of works I labeled "posthumous writings." If only I could finish them. Maybe it was after all just inexperienced grandiose sentimentality. I stored the finished manuscript in three or four big paper bags. Gradually the number of works also grew larger. On the paper bags I wrote with a brush the words "declining years." I intended it as the title for this series of posthumous works. The meaning of it was that with this my life was already at an end. (150)

In the spring of 1933, Dazai and Hatsuyo moved again, this time to a friend's place in Suginami Ward, where they lived for two years. Dazai's remittances from home were reduced after his failure to graduate, so economies had to be made. But Dazai was concerned to the point of obsession with the completion of his masterpiece. He led Hatsuyo and his friends to believe that he would be able to graduate the coming year. About once a week he even put on his uniform and went to the university library, where he stayed all day, either dozing over the books he was supposed to study or else working on his own writing. Apparently no one saw any reason to disbelieve him. His hope was to finish his writing before the money from home was totally cut off. But it was no easy task. The frustration mounted. He felt as if he "was being gnawed to the marrow of my bone by that demon."

When he failed to graduate again, he pleaded with the family to allow him one last year to succeed. It was his only excuse for continuing to receive money. He never revealed the truth to anyone. "I didn't want to create an accomplice. I wanted to remain the perfect prodigal son. I believed that the roles of those around me would then also be clear, that they could not risk being implicated with me." Dazai supposed that if his brothers were to accept and support his literary activities, they would be seen by society as "accomplices" in his "unrealistic" schemes. He felt they could not be expected to do this and would be forced to cut him off. Accordingly, "I had to remain the crafty and cajoling younger brother until the end, deceiving my brothers, or so I seriously considered the situation with my thief-like logic."

Once again Dazai had to deceive his wife and friends. He pretended to go to the university. "But it was hell to fool people all the time." He began to pass sleepless nights, to drink cheap whiskey. He began coughing up phlegm. "I thought maybe I was sick, but I couldn't be bothered with that. I wanted to finish putting together that collection of stories in the paper bags. Maybe it was selfish affectation, but I wanted to leave this thing as an apology to everyone. It was all I had." Toward the end of 1933, *Declining Years* was just about completed.

In late autumn of that year, I managed to finish writing it. I selected just fourteen pieces out of the more than twenty I'd written, and I burned the rest along with the earlier drafts. There was enough to fill up a suitcase. I took it out to the yard and burned the whole thing.

"Tell me, why did you burn it?" H. all of a sudden asked me that night.

"Because I didn't need it anymore," I answered with a smile.

"Why did you burn it?!" She repeated the same words. She was crying.

I began putting things in order around me. I returned borrowed books to their respective owners, and I sold all my letters, notes, and things to the junkman. (151–152)

## *Tenkō* and Literature

As a narrative deriving its force from a given configuration of socio-economic conditions, Marxism has served as the focal point of attacks by both protofascist and fascist as well as by the "various hegemonic and legitimizing ideologies of the middle class state (liberalism, conservatism, . . . social democracy, etc.)."[3] The specific shape of this struggle as it evolved in Japan (significantly in tandem with the phenomenon of *tenkō*) is part of the "repressed" story of modern Japanese history, and no less of modern Japanese literature. And this remains the case in spite of the anomalous presence of numerous Marxist scholars within the Japanese academic establishment. Marxism is hardly the monolithic doctrine its detractors would have it be. It incorporates within it the mechanisms for its own self-criticism and transformation in accordance with the exigencies of a given socio-historical situation. Much of the story of modern Japanese literature and criticism lies in precisely such an effort to interpret the Marxist story in a nation and a world determined to suppress story and storytellers alike. Dazai's work bears the traces of that story of repression, above all in its own narrative manipulation of *tenkō*.

The period of the 1930s in Japan is problematic for students of Japanese history, and it should be no less so for those whose main focus is the literature of that time. The period is treated as one of disjunction, of rupture. It has been associated with a specifically Japanese "failure of freedom,"[4] suggesting an inherent defect in Japan's democratic institution-making process, although in recent years this view has been modified to suggest rather a temporary "setback" in an ongoing process.[5] Treatments of the period do not by and large provide an adequate explanation of what happened in Japan at this time. Attempts to deal with the phenomenon of fascism, including its popular appeal, remain tentative, and this is so whether from a modernizationist or a Marxist economic point of view. "What Marxism has consistently refused to face is precisely

the popular appeal of fascism: a popular appeal which could and still can motivate a class to act against its own material interests."[6]

Similarly the literary development of the period is referred to, as we will see in the next chapter, by the suggestive term "the barren years." The notion of "sin" for having failed, accompanied by divine retribution in the form of a "curse," provides a religious subtext here, much as do the elements of confession and repentance in connection with the phenomenon of *tenkō*, especially in its literary manifestation. And the addition of a forgiving absolute father/big brother in the form of the American Occupation and General MacArthur after defeat (enhanced by the crusading aura of the American effort to reform and save) encapsulates this period of rupture in a manner that can be reassuring to those with a religious view of human history.

Yet the 1930s, in Japanese history or literature, cannot be so conveniently cut out and then pasted back into our notion of progress. Underlying the apparent discontinuity, there is a fundamental continuity apparent through much of the writing across the 1930s and 1940s. And it is the phenomenon of *tenkō* that can help to elucidate the intellectual dilemma. *Tenkō* from the 1930s on becomes the paradigm of the intellectual "quest for autonomy" or "search for authenticity" that is part of the modernization pattern characterizing Japanese development in the twentieth century. It is the advent of political *tenkō* (in the form of the Sano-Nabeyema confessions) in 1933 that crystallizes the fundamental nature of this ideological structure.[7] Political *tenkō* at the basic level confirms the generally imperceptible notion that behind the ideological apparatuses of the State lies a repressive state apparatus (i.e., behind religion, the schools, the family, and behind literature, speech, and culture in general, is to be found the physical force of the police, the army). It is thus that *tenkō* is defined by Tsurumi Shunsuke as "a change of thought effected (with some degree of coercion) by the State."[8]

The full sense of the term *tenkō* lies in its use in the Proletarian Literature debates of the late 1920s. As set out by Fukumoto Kazuo in his *Hōkō tenkan* of 1927, it involved providing the potentially revolutionary individual, perceived of as the subject of a transformation (*henkaku shutai*), with the ability to understand the dialectical relation between one's own conditions and the law of historical change, thus enabling that subject to direct (*tenka saseru*) his or her activities in line with that "universal law."[9] The thrust of most of Western nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy and literature (emulated in Japanese literature from Futabatei's Bunzō to Sōseki's Sensei to Abe Kōbō's "man of the dunes") has been to conceive of the subject as a coherent, hermetic, self-contained entity. To this extent there is a crucial gulf between the subject's social external and psychological subjective being that tends to make in-

dividuals the easy victims of ideological manipulation. One of the areas in which literature has played a role here is in questioning the coherence of this notion of the subject.

*Tenkō* literature was very much a confessional literature deriving from a recognition of failure and "social impotence." It may be helpful to consider two instances, of pre-*tenkō* and *tenkō* writing respectively, both of which exemplify the dominance of realism, even in oppositional literature. Throughout these works, there is the presumption that the subject's idea or representation of what it perceives is identical with "reality" or the way things really are, with the result that the discourse as a whole tends to sustain the comforting notion that things are as they should be. Thus, in a proletarian work like Kobayashi Takiji's *Life in the Communist Party* (*Tōseikatsusha*, 1932), what is ultimately important is not that, in Nakamura Mitsuo's terms, it reads more like a "textbook of ethics than literature,"[10] nor that, in the words of Hirano Ken, the hero is "inhuman" (*hiningenteki*),[11] nor even that it evokes an ideal of commitment against which the apostates (*tenkōsha*) were subsequently to measure themselves. It is rather that the very respectable terms used to describe this work as literature are themselves expressions of the bourgeois realism Kobayashi seeks to overcome. Thus, it can just as easily be praised (by those not excessively offended by its purpose and theme) as having an accessible, straightforward style, or as providing a good depiction of the Manchurian situation developing at the time, or indeed as having a sense of process.

In Nakano Shigeharu's prototype of the *tenkō* novel, *The House in the Village* (*Mura no ie*, 1935), we are confronted with a clash of views between generations, in which the protagonist, the son Benji, through an acute awareness of his potential role as a writer and of his past guilt for having committed *tenkō*, seeks to affirm his autonomy (*shutaisei*) by asserting his independence of his father, Magozō, and the "feudal" thought he represents.[12] Here it is the integration of dialect that lends an aura of naturalness and "reality" to the text. The narrative portion of the text thus contains and echoes that other text, the dialogue, which connotes for the reader the "reality" of the Japanese family, the generational conflict, the urban-rural gap, and all the other oppositions (bourgeois-proletariat, social-antisocial, pure-impure) constituting the coherent subject-protagonist Benji.

In contrast to Nakano's mode of realism, we may note a radical subversion of the linguistic process by another victim of *tenkō*, Haniya Yutaka, whose major *tenkō* work, *Credo Quia Absurdum* (*Fugōri yue ni ware shinzu*), was written in 1939–1940.[13] Haniya's work, from *Cave* (*Dōkutsu*, 1939) and his "Credo" on through *Dead Soul* (*Shirei*, 1946–1949) and "Black Horse in Darkness" (*Yami no naka no kuroi uma*, 1970), is de-

scribed as "gloomy" and considered "opaque." Yukio Mishima has called *Dead Soul* "the black Bible of [postwar] youth" and labeled "Black Horse in Darkness" "the longings and groanings of the unfulfilled revolutionary."[14] Tsurumi Shunsuke roots Haniya's nihilism in his *tenkō* experience of 1933 and the year and a half he spent in prison (the basis for the prison-like spaces filling his works). Haniya's *tenkō* is seen by Tsurumi as constituting a rejection of both Japanese Communist Party official ideology and orthodox Japanese intellectual views: for Tsurumi, Haniya accomplishes his "full-scale critique" by remaining faithful to his own experience.[15]

Haniya's *Credo Quia Absurdum* is, in its form as well as its language and thought, a disturbing piece of writing. It appears as a set of seemingly unrelated aphorisms and commentaries on them in apparently shifting voices. It is above all an attempt, doomed of course to failure, to rid language of its devastating power, that power to convey, over and again, in every conceivable form, that relentless "reality" which has made the individual, the reader, us, Haniya, into its "subject," its victim. *Tenkō* was above all an *act of confession*, of words, of changing from one *statement of reality* to another. And thus Haniya's repeated attempts to refute or defy logic, to escape consciousness, to transcend poetry, are all rooted in his perception of language, expressed here in the metaphorical "predicate" (*hinji*), that is, what is said. His desired "disintegration" of his subjective state, of his humanity, can thus happen only through the creation of his "*own* language" (*dokugo*): "I don't want to be a human being. I'd rather be a riddle." Nonetheless, even this desperate plea for "irrationality" or "nonrationality" (the *fugōri* of his credo) must be framed in the language of logic. No matter how much he might play with it or seek to subvert it, he, like James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, can use words only to hint at the possibility of something else, and he is confined, like the rest of us, by the chains of language.[16]

## An Endless String of Commas

> The intertextual nature of autobiographical writing [is to affirm] that one cannot write *about* oneself, one can only require a self that is always already written.
> —Candace Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism"

The structural dilemma for Japanese intellectuals in the last century has been the attempt to define a "Japanese" culture in a conceptual language that is not considered "Japanese." This process has included efforts to transform Japanese society into a more "democratic" polity. In other

words, the most powerful models and values for achieving these goals have invariably been seen as foreign or alien. Even among the most "enlightened" of Japan's reformists, a sense of distance, of alienation from the very ideal they advocated, allowed a significant empathy with their opponents. The phenomenon of *tenkō* thus incorporates not just a disavowal of a specific ideology (Marxism), but a more general rejection of imported thought. In addition to its most common interpretation as "defection" from Communist Party affiliation, *tenkō* may also be seen as a rejection of rationalistic thought in general and, in an even broader sense, as an "intellectual turning" resulting from a clash with "imported thought."[17]

The term *tenkō* itself displays a suggestive history, having originally been used to signify a "turn toward" Communism, only to be turned on its head by the police to refer to a "turn back" (*saitenkō*) to a "pure" Japanese way of thinking. Comparisons are inevitable with writers in the West, now immortalized in "The God That Failed" syndrome, who rejected Communism. Their "turns," however, involved an uncoerced rejection of an ideal that they had perhaps too uncritically attached to the Soviet Union, whereas in the Japanese case the coercive element was a determining factor. For *tenkōsha*, their "confession" was not so much an exorcising of a "mistaken belief" or a "failed God" but was rather a "spilling of the guts" (symbolic seppuku?) for having been, in the first instance, unfaithful to their own "Japanese" nature. In the next instance (when they narrated, wrote their confession in literature), too, however, it became a further mea culpa for having abandoned Marxism. In both instances, what counted was the purity, the sense of absolute loyalty to a belief, the comportment of the individual, regardless of the nature of the belief. In sum, in the Western case, it was a tainted belief of which the confessed individual was purified; in the Japanese case, the belief remained pure while the individual was permanently contaminated.

Dazai's *tenkō* experience is different, as we shall see. It follows an intriguing thread of intense involvement with love, politics, and writing. His life is echoed by his heroine of *The Setting Sun*, Kazuko: "Man was born for love and revolution." And when he rejects his left-wing activities, he is no more anguished or guilt-laden than is she in her rejection of bourgeois morality: "I haven't a trace of a guilty conscience. . . . I am not in the least wicked" (*The Setting Sun*, 135). The interconnection of romance, politics, and literature with Dazai's ambiguous *tenkō* and his attempted suicide of the same period are key components of his string of autobiographical works.

Dazai's life was an odyssey-like quest echoed in his move from Hirosaki to Tokyo, but even more in his frantic moving from place to place in Tokyo itself (seventeen times in six years), and later in his almost classical

return to his childhood home (written about in *Tsugaru*). There is a progression, not purely chronological, described in "Reminiscences" and "Metamorphosis" as well as in the rest of *Declining Years* and in "Eight Views of Tokyo" and other works, from immersion in and eventual escape from family, romantic love, revolutionary action, and ultimately intense literary activity; and all of these are punctuated by what Dazai calls a string of "commas," referring as much to his unsuccessful attempts at suicide as to his writing. The quest is always in the end a private one whose object, never clearly defined, lies in and beneath contradiction. In the wave of 1920s Marxism, Dazai, the neglected child who felt wronged by society, turned his resentment against his own provincial landlord class. Ultimately, however, he turned it against his own person, seeking to purge what he deemed his "evil" nature through confession and "pure" romantic love. Although his goal in love and politics was personal liberation, he ended up only making himself into a victim and a slave. As we learn from "Reminiscences," Dazai wove a romantic fantasy (around an unwitting female servant) to which he submitted himself. Then, as "Eight Views of Tokyo" reveals, he endeavored to possess totally the geisha Hatsuyo, to possess her love not just in the present but in the past as well, in the process destroying the possibility of a mature equal relationship.

The second level of search is through political activity, arising out of an ostensible desire to change or improve society. Here we have Dazai committed, via Marxism, to the objective of freedom for all humanity and seeking to transcend his personal, romantic notion of freedom and love for a social and humanitarian vision. Yet Marxism was no less a useful pretext for Dazai, who never did study it seriously, if at all. Indeed, he seemed attracted only by those aspects of it that reinforced his already determined notions of escape and death: escape from the oppressiveness of family as well as from his own sense of "evil," inferiority, and uselessness. What Marxism provided him with was a rationale. As a member of the "ruling class," he could see himself as "doomed" to perish. As for humanity, he could best fulfill his role by "returning" the unjust gains of class oppression—providing funds received from his family—but in the end his most significant contribution would be his death. Thus he had a standing justification for suicide. Once again his notions of truth, freedom, and responsibility were clouded by his narcissism. Instead of experiencing freedom through collective action, he preferred to feel enslaved: "I did anything they asked me to do" (146). Instead of love for those around him, he felt distrust of friends, family, and wife. He seemed incapable of directing his indignation beyond those closest to him, even to the enemies that Marxist theory pointed out. His confusion brought

him simultaneously to spurn Hatsuyo and to renounce his political activities by giving himself up to the police, committing *tenkō*.

The third level of quest was writing, which was for Dazai a means of bridging the gap between love and revolution that had caused him to look into hell and seek oblivion. The symbolism of his own life-story is evident in his conscious and not-so-conscious metaphorical usage. It is on a "bridge" that he conceives of writing as a "way out" ("Reminiscences," 29–30), and it is by "jumping into" the water, both in life and in numerous fictional and non-fictional instances, that he tries to resolve (dissolve) the gaps within love and within revolution. Yet, as Dazai's own *tenkō* experience suggests, his attempts at overcoming socio-psychological alienation through writing lead only to that other alienation to be found within the structure of writing and language itself. Writing becomes not only a medium (a means of describing, of confessing his failed attempt at dissolving the contradictions of his life) but a metaphor for the impossibility of achieving success. Thus, in "Metamorphosis," suicide as an attempt to resolve (by dissolving) his female protagonist Suwa's alienation leads to a new alienation—in the medium of water and in a reborn reincarnation—to which another "liquidation" seems the only alternative. The infinite regress of suicidal solutions here is carried over into Dazai's more confessional, autobiographical writings, where it is the very ink and punctuation of the writing operation that point to the open-ended aporetic nature of modern life.

Dazai's *tenkō*, consisting of his giving himself up to the police for his underground activities, takes place two years after the abortive double suicide at Kamakura and immediately after discovering Hatsuyo's previous infidelity. Yet, it is curious that Dazai, the quintessential I-novelist, does not write very much at all about his political activities. One critic refers to it as a big "blank" in his writing that, adopting Dazai's own metaphor, is filled by that "black spot," the death of Tanabe Shimeko at Kamakura.[18] For another critic, Kamei Katsuichirō, the "black [ink] spot" was to "spread and grow throughout his writing up to and including his *No Longer Human* (1948)."[19] Writing, then, is the medium through which the paradox of life and death, of rebirth and suicide, is played out. The suicide at Kamakura is an attempted resolution of that gap between love and revolution. It occurs when he feels abandoned by Hatsuyo, who has gone back to Aomori in the care of his older brother, and as he is feeling increasingly alienated from the leftist movement. Life after death here continues in desultory fashion until the poles of love and revolution once again lead to an impasse, this time the increasing repression of the movement by the police, with the apparent futility of political struggle and the failed "romance" with Hatsuyo as a result of her "impurity."

*Tenkō* at this juncture acts as a symbolic suicide and rebirth, for after

his confession and release, Dazai finds himself "still alive." His new awareness, however, is of having "been in a stupor for so long" (149). Again, the obstinate poles structuring his life-drama reassert themselves so that "once again I planned to die." It is at this point, however, that writing enters to postpone death and, indeed, to act as a surrogate and metaphor for the process of death and rebirth itself. His "confession of childhood" begins to obsess him so that he is "unable to die." Writing as confession does not provide the closure or the resolution that he seeks. Rather, it opens up a chain of infinite progression whose manifestation, and metaphor, is a never-ending "string of commas."

## *Tenkō* as *Littératuricide*

> A conversion experience or a sudden dedication to a cause is for many an alternative to suicide.
> —George De Vos, *Socialization for Achievement*

We have introduced the metaphor of *littératuricide* in connection with Alvarez's *The Savage God* and will have occasion to consider it in our analysis of of Dazai's *The Setting Sun* (Chapter Eight). Let us here make explicit an argument for *tenkō*, and especially for its literary product, *tenkō bungaku*, as an instance of *littératuricide* or symbolic suicide in Japan. The phenomenon of symbolic suicide, suggesting a deliberate destruction of one's creative powers, also includes an enhanced, "posthumous" perspective enabling the writer to narrate his own *littératuricide*. In the case of Japanese *tenkō*, as with Romantics like Coleridge, one's symbolic death (extinguishing the flame of revolution) is accompanied not only by the damning "confession," but often by a literature of contrition whose effect is to turn this symbolic suicide into literary currency. *Tenkō* literature is necessarily autobiographical and shares with the Romantic poet a narrative of failure to align a self with an external reality. As with autobiography in general, which suicide both generates and undoes, the signifier in *tenkō*, be it self, memory, or consciousness, remains a slippery one. Taking the form of a quest for a significant transformation or metamorphosis of the self, *tenkō* literature ends up admitting (confessing) that there never was a turning point as such. It exists only in the confessional narrative, whose text then becomes the turning point. The self that is said to have "turned" does not become a new and different self; it merely claims to have "redirected" itself.

*Tenkō* is also, however, a sign of survival and of resurrection, and as such it is a sign of the dilemma of postwar Japanese literature, whose autobiographical narrative requires its own feints, shifts, and turns. The issue for the Japanese intellectual in the twentieth century has been how

to transform ideas into action, or more precisely, how to transform one's individual relation to ideas (desire, passion) into social action (revolution). This problematic underlies many of the intense debates over politics and literature throughout the century. The experience of Marxism is, of course, a central focus in this connection. And the 1930s and the experience of *tenkō* constitute for many the ultimate challenge to this effort to transform words into action, a challenge that was not met.

The story of that failure requires a meaningful turning point (*tenki*) to restore coherence, continuity, and legitimacy to the narrative. But this turning point, for which *tenkō* became the ultimate metaphor, is also a sign of a gap, an aporia, and a forgetting. As sign, it acts to bridge that gap between its component signifier and signified. *Tenkō*, as the unfulfilled realization of revolution, of Marxism, points to the aporetic gap between the Japanese intellectual (as paradigm for the Japanese individual) and a Marxist (Western) vision of a revolutionary society. The gap includes the other oppositions familiar to the dilemma of modern Japanese literary history (individual/collective, East/West), leading to the prominence and elusiveness of those ideals of an "individual" self, a "modern" society, and a "modern" language and literature. The other component of *littératuricide*, survival, however, seems to require, above all for the intellectual, a displacement of the prewar gap and its transformation into a postwar bridge.

Thus, the focus of *tenkō* becomes less an analysis of Japanese prewar society and its relation to world imperialism than an autobiographical confession of individual, personal failure to overcome the gap between language and action, between oneself and society. It is not coincidental that this reconstituted narrative, with its paradigm of *tenkō*, accords so well with the Japanese "mainstream" of the I-novel, also erected on an aporetic gap between romantic individualism and unfulfilled desire, and with the American Occupation's encouragement of an individualistic approach to democratic change. For the hidden factor in the Western democratic ideology of capitalism that informs so much of the Japanese story as well is the structural necessity of individual failure and alienation. (The multimillion dollar lottery is only the most recent version of the familiar capitalist fantasy that makes believers of the millions who will never realize that dream.) A general desire for success is vital to the capitalist, but that desire will not function without a model of potential failure. That model is provided in part by the alienated suicidal writer, the paradigm of romantic failure erected by the *bundan* around writers like Dazai, and the association of autobiographical fiction, the I-novel, and *tenkō*, with that image, whereby the story of the writer parallels that of the nation. The twist is that this is an anti-image, the anti-allegory or

antihero whose existence confirms the reality and legitimacy of its positive mirror-image.

In Chapter Seven we will see how Dazai's postwar writings resist this neat monumentalization. Let us here briefly preview Dazai's textual deflation of love and revolution, autobiography and modernization, history and the war, as it is played out in his fiction and nonfiction of the postwar years. We will pay particular attention to the notion of a turning point (*tenki*), raised and rejected by Dazai in "An Almanac of Agony," noting how it is collapsed by Dazai, with the result that autobiography, confession, and *tenkō* are revealed to be highly unreliable indicators of self, contrition, and disillusionment, not to mention history.

Dazai's use of a fragmented textual mode undermines the narrative paradigm of closure by instituting an unbridgeable open-endedness to his texts. His "endless string of commas" and suicides as metaphors for life and writing, as we have seen in "Eight Views of Tokyo," along with the undecidable "endings" of works of fiction from "Metamorphosis" to *The Setting Sun*, resist the type of closure one finds in romantic love and suicide narratives.

Dazai's texts also question the traditional dichotomies between history and literature, public and private, as well as nonfiction and fiction. The narrator of "An Almanac of Agony" (203) refuses to fit his private, personal story into "the tomes of historians" and insists instead on the integrity of a fragmented recording so as to avoid narrative synthesis. The irony of this resistance is that Dazai knows that his broken narrative of diaries, letters, fragments, and and aphorisms, whether in the form of published "public" works or "private" letters (to be published "posthumously"), will be synthesized into the collected works, biographies, and analyses of the writer and his oeuvre. Dazai's attempted subversion of this monumentalization process involves creating a multiplicity of selves and a "persona" whose authenticity is always subject to doubt. It also involves a radical questioning of those social institutional apparatuses (the *bundan*, above all) whose public status depends on a coherent narrative of successful modernization. To be sure, this narrative also conceals a romantic autobiography of marginalization and *tenkō*, and concomitant with intellectual *tenkō* is a national amnesia, required by the desire to have been a victim and not an oppressor.[20]

For the Japanese people during the war (in Asia the war began in 1931), everyday life went on as usual. If it changed, it did so only in tangential and unanticipated ways. The process of repressing the memory of the war was further facilitated by its being perceived through the filters of the censored media. In *The Setting Sun*, Kazuko's recollection of the war merges with Naoji's suppression of his Pacific experience ("I've forgotten," 59) and is echoed by a general indifference. Observes Kazuko:

> What a dreary business the war was.
>
> Last year nothing happened,
> The year before nothing happened.
> And the year before that nothing happened.
>
> An amusing poem to this effect appeared in a newspaper just after the war ended. Of course all kinds of things actually did take place, but when I try to recall them now, I experience that same feeling that nothing happened.
>
> (*The Setting Sun*, 37)

What did change for Kazuko, however, was symptomatic of change for women in general in wartime situations, and that was a chance to assume men's roles and with them a certain autonomy, enhanced in Kazuko's case by a heightened perception of her own *déclassement*.

> Thanks to it [conscripted manual labor] I became quite robust, and even now I sometimes think that if ever I have difficulty in eking out a living, I can always get along by performing manual labor. (*The Setting Sun*, 37)

The loss of memory, of consciousness, as in Kazuko's "transformation" into peasant or mature woman, seems to accompany the emergence of a utopian ideal. Dazai's notion of class merger involving energy transfer is replicated in *tenkō* as the symbolic suicide and rebirth that parallel the postwar emergence of the *bundan* writer and critic, in their metamorphosis from marginal outcast to romantic individualist to modern cosmopolitan success. What Dazai does is to demystify this process, revealing it to be the familiar one of narrative construction, of building coherent paradigms and inevitably suppressing gaps, concealing repressions. The postwar utopia in Dazai remains an ambiguous desire for a new world hostile to both the constructs of the past and those of the present (as proffered by the Western democracies). Utopia remains there as desire, personified in Kazuko's unborn baby at the conclusion of *The Setting Sun*, perhaps to emerge in the paradigm of deformed births that structures the writing of later writers like Ōe Kenzaburō. But for Dazai, the structure of the postwar period remains open-ended, as it has been in Japan for a long time.

Let us summarize Chapter Six and anticipate Chapter Seven. The theme of a "deathscript of survival" focuses on the role of the Japanese phenomenon of political apostasy (renunciation of communism) known as *tenkō* and its literary by-product, *tenkō bungaku*, thus situating the dilemma of modern Japanese literature in its struggle with the issues of class and revolution, of subjective individual and objective historical change. A contrast was drawn between the *tenkō* literature of the 1930s and 1940s, suffused with the mode of autobiographical realism, and Dazai's narrative of undecidable *tenkō*, in which the autobiographical im-

perative, the conversion or turning point, is revealed to be no more than a distorting narrative device. As such, however, *tenkō* may also be seen as a form of *littératuricide* or symbolic suicide, and to function as a metaphor for Japan's own rewriting (and repressing) of its prewar and wartime history. In Chapter Seven, "Allegorical Undoings," we will see how Dazai's mode of suicidal autobiography deconstructs the symbolic synthesis of prewar-postwar coherence resurrected by modernization theory and the efforts to rewrite the national narrative in the aftermath of a ruinous war. The metaphorical depiction of the postwar period as a miraculous rebirth depends on the narrative suppression of a prewar "barrenness," and it is within the metaphorical construct of postwar death and rebirth that Dazai's textuality defines itself.

## *Chapter Seven*

# ALLEGORICAL UNDOINGS

> To read one's life as a novel can be a very questionable activity, and the novels are prompt to question it, showing the flaws in our drive towards unity and intelligibility, making us feel that we are not very much at home in the interpreted world, much as we would like to think that we were.
> —Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*

IN THE immediate postwar period Dazai's project shifts to a pattern of radically questioning the "fiction" of Japan's national narrative in conjunction with the skeptical reading of his own life. In what takes on the pattern of an obstreperous crescendo, the distinction between fiction and Dazai's actual life of decadent behavior becomes impossible to ascertain up to and including Dazai's own ambiguous suicide in 1948. More and more, the narrator-author Dazai seems to be living life as if it were the writing/reading of a novel, with the result that his texts emerge as rejections of any transcendental, metaphysical, or symbolic synthesis. Instead, they seem to call for an open-ended process of allegorical (in de Man's sense of an "impossibility of reading")[1] undoing of life and meaning.

> At one level the text can be justified and read as a self-sufficient representation, an attempt at what we have come to call realism, which need pose no problems. . . . When one tries to go beyond that to a symbolic synthesis . . . one finds that this can be accomplished only in a state of critical blindness which ignores the ways in which the text mocks and undercuts such interpretative processes. But this mocking and undercutting activity carries one to a level of interpretation which may be called allegorical rather than symbolic.[2]

The process of "symbolic synthesis" referred to by Jonathan Culler in his study of Flaubert is that against which Dazai's life-text struggles at such great risk. It is in order to maintain the integrity of the allegorical against the symbolic that Dazai's persona contorts itself into myriad selves and contradictions. But, whereas Culler's Flaubert must submerge his narrative self in order to "succeed," Dazai's project is to undermine

the "success" of his own allegory, for to allow it to succeed is paradoxically to allow another symbolic synthesis to emerge. As Culler puts it,

> As long as the narrator remains a major figure in the work or a source of authority, his vision and personality will be made the determinant of the story and the truth to which it must be related. And this . . . produces failure. Success requires that the narrator become less adept at interpretation, that he abandon the attempt to express his conviction that all comes to naught, and that he content himself with displaying, under the guise of a realistic project, a recognizable world, whose negativity appears only in the interstices of sentences. (67)

Dazai's life-text inverts this prescription for success, displaying rather a world of rampant negativity in which a more familiar "recognizable" reality appears only in the interstices. Dazai's allegorical stance is directed not only against society's attempts to "read" him as an individual, but against Japanese society's efforts to create a symbolic synthesis of itself. For Dazai, this process of making the nation into a coherent unity spans the gap between the prewar and postwar periods and shifts too easily from rightist ultranationalism to democratic liberalism. In both instances, the symbolic synthesis, like Flaubert's realistic text, "can be accomplished only in a state of critical blindness." And in the process those differences, conflicts, and oppressions that constitute and threaten the synthesis are suppressed and submerged.

Dazai's postwar writing, both autobiographical as in "An Almanac of Agony" and fictional as in *The Setting Sun*, is directed against the critical and journalistic drive to rewrite the narrative of Japan in order to make its story fit the pattern of a modern democratic success story. And to the extent that this involves the writer, historian, and intellectual in a process of forgetting, distorting, or synthesizing, Dazai's angry irony is directed at them. As if to preempt that inevitable turning of the tables, however, he directs his irony through his own persona and at his own symbolic status as a negative indicator of modernity. The tenuousness of the distinction between allegory and anti-allegory is brought out in this instance, as is the earlier discussed controversy over national allegory (see Chapter One). Dazai, as the deconstructionist *avant la lettre* that he seems to be, in seeking to undo what already exists (or is conceivable) can only confirm its possibility. In the postwar period, this means that the more he resists monumentalization, whether of himself as a writer and persona or of Japan as a postimperialist power, the more those narratives paradoxically take on coherence.

Let us begin by examining the metaphorical depiction of the Japanese prewar and postwar periods in the general press, its emphasis on death and rebirth, and then consider the subversive nature of Dazai's suicidal

autobiography in the postwar context in two key texts, "An Almanac of Agony" and "For Fifteen Years."

## The Myth of Rebirth: Japan in 1945

> On that day of total emptiness, the edifice of our entire past existence collapsed. It was also the first day of creation, when all existence waited to be called into being.
> —Honda Shūgo, *Monogatari sengo Nihon bungakushi*

If there is a metaphorical paradigm that best characterizes historical writing about the 1940s in Japan, it is that of death and rebirth. This already charged, figurative language, widely used to categorize the chaotic events of human existence, in this instance projects the pre-1945 era as a dark and "barren" valley prior to a bright "renaissance" under American auspices. That many Japanese genuinely perceived the end of militaristic controls and wartime devastation as a rebirth into a new world is perhaps not unrelated to a more general (extending to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe) feeling of emergence into a freer world system than had been the case under prewar imperialisms.

For the Japanese, of course, immediate survival was the paramount concern. Having been rocked back and forth between the violent extremes of kamikaze heroism, atomic cataclysm, saturation bombing, and foreign occupation, the immediate prospects in August 1945 were bleak. And if the American presence turned out not to be the horror it had been anticipated to be, the physical ruin accompanied by mass deprivation and hunger still convinced many Japanese that they were indeed at ground zero.

At the same time, however, unprecedented freedoms to organize, militate, speak, write, if limited by scarce resources and a modicum of military censorship, were rapidly being made available under the control of the occupying Americans and their Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (SCAP). The resulting combination of marginal deprivation (buffeted by American rations and black marketeering) and relative freedom seemed to produce a mood of heady optimism and expressive vitality. "New life" and "democracy" were the slogans, if not the genuine aspirations, of the majority of the Japanese people.

What was heralded as a "glorious revival" was perhaps, as Mishima Yukio put it wincingly, no more than the reinstitution of "everyday life" after so many years of severe wartime restrictions. Like the taste of water to the desert-parched wanderer, how delicious and quenching must have seemed the first weather forecast broadcast on Japanese radio on August

17, 1945, after almost four years of national-defense-imposed silence. Or the reappearance of popular radio melodramas and the voice of Namiki Michiko singing the "apple song" (*ringo no uta*).[3]

In order to gain a sense of the issues facing writers as the heroic war effort was transformed into the heroic recovery, let us examine in some detail the reflection of events as they were conveyed through the press during the turbulent August of 1945, which may be the best described of all months in Japanese history. The emotional drama of the Japanese people as they saw their cities being bombed to rubble, as they came to understand the significance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as they fearfully awaited occupation by the dreaded American invasion force, and then, on that pivotal day marking the middle of the month, hearing for the first time ever the imperial larynx utter its denial of divinity in that now familiar "high-pitched" tone and that augustly formal and obscure Japanese—all of this, as well as the aftermath of economic and social chaos, of trains packed with city dwellers in search of food, of black markets and GIs, and more, is recounted in histories, film, newspapers, fiction, and diaries.

Even the senior man of letters Nagai Kafū, momentarily neglecting his Edo nostalgia, observed his compatriots turned "scavengers." In scenes reminiscent of Akutagawa's evocation (in "Rashōmon") of the desperate poor of eleventh-century Japan stripping and scalping the dead, Kafū captures through his pen's eye a passenger on a train stealing rice from an old woman who has died next to her, only to sell it in the next instant to a man riding by on a bicycle.[4]

The day after surrender, the newspapers editorialized on the "Problems of Peace." People were reported to be living in makeshift shacks built from the wreckage of their houses and in dugouts in the craters where their homes had been; others were imposing on distant relatives or on total strangers. In a tone hardly laudatory of the proclaimed Japanese penchant for the group, the *Nippon Times* of August 16, 1945, expressed concern at the "social and physical strains of communal living" being suffered by the Japanese.[5]

The theme of recovery, however, was soon being intoned by the media in the name of the new occupying "masters." Within days after the devastating horror of the atomic bombs, the papers enumerated the peaceful uses of atomic power, accepting with almost cheerful innocence a statement of the United States government:

> The United States War Department has cleared up speculation on the possible lingering radioactive effects of the atomic bomb explosions. . . . The bomb, it was reported, "is detonated in combat at such a height that practi-

> cally all radioactive products are carried upward in an ascending column of hot air and dispersed harmlessly over a wide area." (*NT* 8/16/45, 2:3)

By the end of August, the theme of optimistic reassurance had shifted to a more didactic tone, exhorting the people to a new world role and warning against the dangers of "isolation."

> The first task of postwar Japan must be to emerge from her present condition of isolation and move in harmony with the new current of the world through reasonable and peaceful means. The situation of today resembles that of the early days of Meiji in that she is isolated from, and hence is not an active participant in, world civilization. Japan must first shoulder the hardship of defeat, acknowledging it frankly and quickly. . . . It must also be realized that the burden of defeat cannot be disposed of merely by material and spiritual reparations. . . . It will require a more positive launching of the Japanese people on the tide of a new civilization. (*NT* 8/29/45, 4:1)

The metaphor of rebirth, as all metaphors, enchains an endless series of other metaphors, from isolation to harmony, from passive to active, from protective island cove to "launching on the tide of a new civilization." Behind the abstractions, however, is a hegemonic urge: in the area of atomic energy, it is affirmed that "Japan must not be left behind in isolation," and the "dean of Japanese literature," Kikuchi Kan, proclaims that the postwar mission of Japanese literature must be to raise itself to a level "equal to that of the rest of the world" (*NT* 8/28/45, 3:4).

As the Americans and General MacArthur arrived at Atsugi airbase on August 30, the themes of amity and optimism were highlighted by American smiles juxtaposed, on the printed page, with the smiles of young Japanese rebuilding their country. Beneath the headline "Friendliness Marks Landing at Atsugi," the by-now familiar stereotype of the "broadly smiling far-from-warlike U.S. airman offering cigarettes and gum" was inscribed. "Some of them picked wild flowers and pinned them on their jackets [and] one took off his pistol and put it in his pocket" (*NT* 8/30/45, 3:2). Meanwhile, the rebuilding of the Asakusa Temple amusement area, destroyed by bombs on March 10, was reported to be in full swing, "already dispensing amusement to a growing number of young men and women who are in need of relaxation after the terrific stress they went through as munitions workers." The *Tōkyō Shimbun* saw in the "radiant smiles" of the young people in Asakusa a "reflection of the indomitable spirit of the Japanese people as they construct a new Japan" (*NT* 8/30/45, 3:2).

There was anxiety, however, on both sides of the Pacific. Editorials stressed the need to "interpret the 'real' Japan to the West," and in a meditation on Japan's "Second Opening" involving a comparison be-

tween Commodore Perry and General MacArthur, the dangers of cross-cultural stereotyping were once again evoked: "It is a sad state of affairs . . . that to most American minds the Japanese are a race only slightly removed from their simian ancestors and thirsting for the blood of the world, while to many Japanese all Americans are relatives of Al Capone and are given to enjoying a lynching party every Saturday night" (*NT* 8/29/45, 4:3).[6]

The United States also found it propitious to wind down its propaganda machine. From such classics as *Time* magazine's 1944 guidelines on "How to Tell Your [Chinese] Friends from the Japs,"[7] the *New York Times* (8/27/45) moved to a more paternalistic mode, warning that the decisive factor in Japan's future would be how well the Japanese learned to "appreciate the moral and spiritual values of the West."

Not everyone in Japan agreed with this prognosis. On the last day of August, the *Mainichi Shimbun* published the views of ex-lieutenant Ishihara Kanji on the need for a "spiritual awakening and the elimination of self-deception." The defeat of Japan was to be attributed to "a moral decay among the people in politics, production, life, which has resulted in a nullification of fighting power." Ishihara went on to develop a metaphor somewhat different from the prevailing one:

> America will endeavor to Americanize Japan by . . . introducing its ways of life, culture, and ideas. Truly Japanese thoughts, customs . . . will be torn to pieces and destroyed. I personally believe that so far as her thought is concerned, Japan will be tossed into the very depth of the abyss.
>
> Even the war has not awakened the Japanese people. In short, we have not suffered enough. A craving for an abode for the soul of the race comes only after a protracted fall to the bottom of the abyss, when the members of the race are at the end of their resources. A refreshing breeze, the pleasant flame of a torch will come only when the soul comes to crave it. O, waves! Rage as you like! O, winds. Blow gales! Angry seas and high winds are the ritual of purification that the Japanese people must go through if they are to find themselves a race at all.
>
> In this way I see bright hope for the future, but only if first there is deep penitence. We must eliminate such undesirable things peculiar to the Japanese as willfulness, an exaggerated sense of one's importance, pleasure taken in slandering others, jealousy, and insistence on one's sphere of influence. . . . Only then can there be regeneration. (*NT* 8/31/45, 3:3)

Ishihara's rhetorical effusiveness covers a wide metaphorical range, including rebirth and reawakening, but also the abyss and fall that are so central to Dazai's and Sakaguchi's repertoire of tropes, if in a significantly different mode.[8]

The tropological predilection toward a perhaps more Buddhist reso-

nance in calling for an awakening from self-deception belies a linkage with a more leftist-liberal notion of liberation. The postwar intellectual debates on politics, literature, and the war were to focus on the issues of individualism, subjectivity, autonomy, existentialism, and modernism. For all the philosophical fine tuning, however, which simultaneously reflected a genuine idealistic commitment and a fatalistic awareness of the aporetic distance between academic debate and political economy, the issue of freedom under advanced capitalism appeared to emerge as at best a moot point.

In the immediate aftermath of the defeat, the notion of freedom, whatever the term used, was rooted in the struggle to survive. The indefatigable Kafū, able to "feast" literarily on the scenes of desperate scavenging, cryptically declared that "there will be freedom as long as there is life."[9] And Hidaka Rokurō found that the collapse of the state and its incapacity to provide the populace with the basic necessities made the people into "de facto individualists" even "before they were exposed to the concept of individualism." [10]

The attempts to define freedom and to establish a Japanese autonomy that is different from the West's parallel the move on the part of writers, historian and novelist alike, to capture a certain immediacy, to "seize the moment" of this "postwar" with its augur of a different and better future. Yet, as we shall see, it is precisely the impossibility of this attempt that only a devious, deviant few will dare to demonstrate.

Perhaps the critic Nakamura Mitsuo came closest to describing the situation in a statement that has overtones of a Freudian-Buddhist amalgam: "It was rather human desire than man himself that was liberated here."[11] For a writer like Dazai, too, it would appear that the Japanese people had been freed only to desire freedom. They were now vulnerable to the big lie of "democracy," which was but an exotic form of the prewar *kokutai* (national polity). And, as a chastened, sobered leftist might add in retrospect, the ultimate irony was that, while exulting in the illusion of freedom, their chances for genuine political and economic freedom were being taken away.

Myths, beliefs, and deceptions are a necessary part of survival, yet it is also their nature to mask the violence from which they arise. Espousal of the rebirth metaphor inevitably meant the bleaching of Japan's prewar past, saddling a set of values, beliefs, and facts to a goat labeled feudalism and sending it off into the wilderness of pre(war) history. Only thus might life "begin anew." The miraculous nature of the rebirth had of course to do with the awareness of physical death and destruction to degrees of magnitude never imagined or anticipated. Death is one of those impasses that the human narrative mechanism is reluctant to or incapable of recognizing as such and hence is inclined—if not obliged—to leap over.

Death must be explained, narrativized, overcome, if only to account for a surviving consciousness that can contemplate it. The aporia of death may thus be described as "dying in order to live," and this dialectically oriented notion may be seen to structure much of the narrative of postwar Japan. It is congruent of course with Marxist notions of the waning of ruling classes in favor of new, more democratic groupings, as it is with Christian beliefs in rebirth. Both of these are dealt with in Dazai's postwar works.

## The Barren Years: Modernization Derailed

The prewar and war years in Japan are seen as a "dark valley" (*kurai tanima*) between a period of "positive" socio-economic development after World War I to the resumption of "modernization in the postwar."[12] The metaphor shifts from light and topography to fertility in Donald Keene's description of the literary production of this period as "barren."[13] There is a revealing slippage here, for even though Keene's article deals exclusively with the literature of these years, and in fact is even more narrowly focused on writings dealing with the war itself, his title shifts his intended signified, the literature, to a different one: the inferred reality of those years. In other words, behind the judgment that the "quality of war literature suffered . . . because the writers were not at liberty to express even the smallest doubts about the war" (68) is a reading of the quality of Japanese life at that time as oppressive, uninteresting, but above all "barren." The import of this metaphor and its sliding signified may best be seen in relation to the postwar metaphor of rebirth. For Japan to be "reborn" required not only the dying and destruction associated with the war, but the positing of an explanation, a cause for its death. The term barrenness, with its biblical overtones, calls to mind the didactic element of punishment. The curse of nonproductivity, associated equally with land and woman as vehicles of the future, is the abiding fear of marginal agricultural societies, and its anxieties are retransmitted via the word to the more contemporary terrors of mass and national destruction through war and the atom. The postwar narrative, with its divine apparatus (the American Occupation) inseminating a barren Japan, requires that Japan, in its prewar "female" aspect, had gone astray from the correct path of democratic Westernization and suffered a period of bleakness. In sum, the greater the light of the postwar period, the darker became that before the war.[14]

But the "barren" refers also to the writing itself. Japan's more "authentic" voice of doubtful skepticism was muffled by "mindless repetitions of praise for everything that is truly Japanese and contempt for the barbarians they were fighting."[15] Punishment thus involved a devaluation not

only of daily life but even of the preeminently modern consciousness and expression of dissatisfaction with that devaluation. Thus it was that one of the prime aspects of the postwar period is the "resurrection" of the publishing industry. Only a cacaphony of voices could act as a sign of the miraculous rebirth taking place. And part of the story of that miracle had to involve a forgetting of prewar times, a repression above all of what had "caused" Japan's deviation and punishment.

The state of publications in 1945 is rendered dramatically by photographs of downtown Tokyo taken by United States Air Force pilots. The Kanda area, center of Tokyo's—and Japan's—entire publishing industry, is a blanket of white (indicating charred ruins) on the photographs.[16] Out of this nothingness was created, within a matter of months, a new and vital industry. A profusion of words sought the light of the new sun of "freedom." The 'new life' epithet was perhaps most poignantly appropriate to the revival of the political and literary left, whose voice had been brutally suppressed in the early 1930s. To be sure, United States Occupation policy was both benefactor and beneficiary of this deliberate mobilization of the dismantled left. The occupier's goal of instituting a counterweight to the wartime-centralized economic and imperial military system seemed to call for a labor force and political party structure oriented to democratic values. The left was only too glad to comply, thanking the Occupation for its benevolence and espousing the authorized ideals of democracy and freedom.

This is not to say that all leftist leaders, literary and otherwise, were naive flagwavers. The complexity of their reaction to the war, the defeat, and the American presence is reflected in the intense debates about responsibility for the war, in the relations of culture to politics, as well as in the probing bittersweet fiction that sought to exorcise guilt from elation.[17] These often intense reflections, however, were more typical of intellectuals than of the populace at large. Against the backdrop of gradually increasing material recovery, the popular mood has been, especially in the perspective of the postwar Japanese "miracle," chronicled as one of incremental optimism. Although initially confronted with disastrous inflation and the specter of starvation, the relief at a state of warless calm and the day-by-day return to normalcy fueled a burgeoning sense of hope for new and unparalleled opportunities.

The resurrection of the publishing industry, in spite of its almost total decimation by war's end, and in spite of scarcities of basics, brought forth an outpouring of new journals with titles symptomatic of the mood (New Life, New Japan, New Humanity, Freedom, Revolution) and new license to criticize or write about everything, from emperor to sex, with the exception of the Occupation itself. The public responded with a voracious reading appetite, as if to compensate for the lack of food.

## Modernization Resurrected: Reversing the Course

Raymond Williams, in describing the literature of industrial England, has referred to the process of cultural transmission as the "working of selective tradition."[18] In this process, the complex realities of a society's present are reduced to strands that are woven into a single (story) line of development. The syntagmatic necessities of narrative are at work here as in all discourse, requiring that the multiplicity of strands or paradigmatic possibilities be reduced and selected.

What is perhaps so striking about Japan's cultural development in the immediate postwar period is the apparent speed with which one dominant paradigm reversed itself in favor of another. The "reverse course" of American Occupation policy, whereby in 1947 and 1948, as part of a United States reaction to the Chinese Revolution and the Berlin blockade, SCAP's goals shifted from reform and democracy to rearming and rebuilding Japan as an ally against communism, is a convenient indicator of a general shift apparent in the popular mood as well as in intellectual and cultural milieux. If the dominant postwar paradigm was a joyful discontinuity relative to a disagreeable past, now, after a game of carrot and stick (from the institution of democratic reform to the depurging of wartime leaders and suppression of labor strikes) a subtle skepticism set in.

In actuality, the "official" changes had affected only restricted areas of life. At the level of work and play, the thrust was toward a reestablishment of the familiar everyday, not a brave new world. The preference in literature, by publishers and readers alike, was not for new faces but for the familiar "old greats." The purge of writers who had collaborated most intimately with the war propaganda machine took three years to prepare, by which time it had little possible significance; in any event, it either coincided with the depurging of war collaborators or ignored the continuing power of many former *zaibatsu* (financial combine) leaders.[19] To be sure, the reverse course, involving a reassumption of power by purged elements, was not so apparent at the time. The mood of skepticism it now signals was only a vague apprehension beneath the exultant revival of the democratic experiment.

One of the ironic aspects of United States and Western European hostility toward Japan in the 1970s and 1980s is that much of Japan's reindustrialization was made possible by the need to replace totally decimated plants. Building from scratch while benefiting from the most up-to-date technology (and having special access to it through the United States Occupation) gave Japan an advantage over its Western capitalist rivals, whose political economics required piecemeal reinvestment and improvement rather than wholesale replacement. The situation once again parallels Japan's emergence onto the world capitalist scene in the

Meiji period, when it was able to import technology and expertise and to commandeer the growth of its carefully selected vital needs. Like the *yatoigaijin* (foreign hired teachers) of the Meiji, the Fenollosas and the Griffises, the Occupation and Japan's close relation to the United States brought its Dodges and Demings.[20]

All of this, however, as in the Meiji period, masks the persistence of certain socio-economic continuities whose reproduction is guaranteed and protected. In this situation, the subtle shift from a sense of unlimited possibility, from a new world vision, to the reassertion of underlying forms and forces, is most keenly perceived by that generation directly affected by it, the young. The sense of increasing deep cynicism and wry despair that young readers shared with writers like Dazai points to a tendency to see the vision of liberation and democracy as a bubble about to burst.

## Strands of Suffering

> There has been a dramatic increase in the number of people maligning the Emperor. Yet, in observing this trend, I realize just how deeply I have come to love him. I announced myself as a conservative to my friends.
>
> A democrat at age ten, a communist at age twenty, a purist at age thirty, and a conservative at age forty. Does history thus repeat itself after all? I think history should not repeat itself.
>
> —Dazai Osamu, "An Almanac of Agony"

Like Sakaguchi Ango's "On Decadence" of April 1946, Dazai's "An Almanac of Agony," published in March 1946, begins with a denial of change. "I don't think the times have changed one bit. There's a kind of dumb feeling in the air, not unlike a fox riding a horse."[21] In a time of trumpets heralding a new age, the intent here cannot but be iconoclastic, and as such it is especially assimilable to the characteristic churlishness of the Buraiha writers. There is, however, more involved here, as a reading of "An Almanac of Agony" reveals. Dazai's opening blast evokes the continuity/discontinuity problematic of Japanese historiography, but it does so in a suggestive way. Like the fox precariously perched astride a galloping horse, the issue of control, of mastery is an ambiguous one at best. As Dazai's subsequent retrospective of his own life and writing over Japan's twentieth-century history implies, the horse here may be none other than the process of history itself, with the fox representing a Japanese collective consciousness holding on for dear life.

"An Almanac of Agony" is a typically elusive and evocative example of Dazai's writing. Positioned as it is at the apex of a national self-consciousness of a "turning point," and directed simultaneously toward both past and future, to the interior (social and psychological) and exterior (political and national), it also incorporates that ambiguous mode of narration and fragmentation so characteristic of Dazai.

The "theme" of "An Almanac of Agony" is the contemporary trend of thought labeled "democracy" and characterized as "new," these terms implying a clean break, or an epistemological rupture, with an older "feudal" and premodern way of thought, epitomized by the institution of the emperor system. The same "motif" is repeated in a more fully developed arrangement in "For Fifteen Years" (*Jūgonenkan*, 1946), a companion piece to "An Almanac of Agony." Taken together, these two ostensibly autobiographical retrospectives, written at the height of Japanese self-conscious preoccupation with the meaning of defeat and "liberation," may serve as a prelude to a consideration of Dazai's postwar fiction. Moreover, these two pieces are also situated strategically within Dazai's own postwar literary production, constituting as they do overtly autobiographical retrospectives linking Dazai's life and writing to the history of Japan and stating in abstract, polemical terms the ideological concerns that emerge fleshed out in the explosive production of fiction during these next few years.

Four strands may be isolated within these two works to serve as guides in our subsequent consideration of Dazai's fiction: (a) the problematization of narrative form, by the use of multiple or shifting narrator-personae, unstable voice, and fragmented narration; (b) the opposition of "writers" to "thinkers" and "historians," and of the *private*, personal experiential mode to the *public* ideological realm of the political and literary establishment labeled by Dazai as "salon" hypocrisy; (c) the rejection of "turning points" (*tenki*) as an acceptable depiction of individual development, and a concomitant assertion of continuity (no change) in individual and social ideological self-definition; and (d) an opposition between rural and urban, engendering the oblique positing of a utopian alternative. These four issues will be examined with a view to elaborating further Dazai's project as a "suicidal autobiographer." Beyond investigating Dazai's use of suicide as a device to undermine critical attempts to reconstruct him into a coherent, transcendent self, we shall also consider the implications of the above four as touchstones of an antimodernizationist and/or postmodernist stance within the ideological configurations of postwar Japan.

"An Almanac of Agony" stitches together a series of personal reminiscences with quotations from earlier works and reflections on events and phenomena of the previous forty years (Dazai's "life"), ranging from lit-

erature and history to religion and politics. Individual sections, separated by space markers in the text, consist of a maximum of four pages (the opening section that incorporates lengthy citations from his early autobiographical "Reminiscences") to a minimum of a half-line reflection: "Jesus Christ. I have felt only his suffering" (210). Syntax varies between smooth, flowing, grammatically complete sentences and choppy one-word or one-phrase utterances. This distinctive style is reflected at the sectional level by an apparently randomly arranged sequence, connected by logical or emotional (sense) associations with no particular overall determining criteria.

What makes "An Almanac of Agony" especially instructive, beyond its distinctive narrative mode, is the author-narrator's conscious grappling with the very problem of how to narrate. Moreover, this problematization directs itself above all to the fault line between history and literature, seen as oppositional modes of "grasping the trends of thought of our time" (203). That this "thought" as the object of study is itself problematic is also recognized by the narrator: "I even feel a resistance to the word 'thought' itself. And I get all the more irritated at notions of 'the development of thought.' It makes me think of a trained monkey act" (204).

Dazai's concern and experimentation with a multiplicity of genres and forms is itself a reflection of a persistent and agonizing discomfort incumbent on a writer in struggle with his or her own work. The problematization of narrative form in Dazai, however, takes on an added dimension when, as the works at hand suggest, it is not only the elusive quality of truth or nature that asserts itself, but the questioning of the very desire to capture or express that "truth," whether it be nature, history, or one's own self. There is, for example, a considerable difference between the confident approach of a Mori Ōgai, a Natsume Sōseki, or a Mishima Yukio and the ambivalent stance of a Dazai. And this is so even in their homologous tendency, over their respective careers, to apply their prodigious talents to formal experimentation. Ōgai shifted dramatically from the German Romantic overtones of his early fiction to the clinical search for Japan's quintessential soul in his late historical fiction. Sōseki sought an appropriate style that took him from the social satire of *I Am a Cat*, (1905–1906) and *Botchan* (1906) and the haiku-novel experiment of *Pillow of Grass* (1906) to the sophisticated epistolary mode of *Kokoro* (1914). Mishima conducted brilliant forays into what would appear to be every available human invention for telling a story from classical Nō and Kabuki to Western drama and cinema. Yet none of these efforts, themselves representing several high points of modern Japanese literature, begins to suggest the kind of problematization of form that characterizes Dazai's writing, from "Leaves" in 1933 on, and marks his creativity throughout the variety of genre experiments and narrative styles that he adopts.

To put the difference as explicitly as possible, we may say that the other writers we have mentioned, for all the turmoil of their own lives, visions, and writing, never doubt the existence of an essence or of a truth that conditions and gives direction to their creative quest. Be that essence the historical "truth" of Japan, the mystical and elusive Japanese "spirit," or the ultimate and devastating alienation of individuated humanity there is the confidence in these writings that the creative process involves above all a fitting of the appropriate signifier to a stable signified.

If this approach to literature is suggestive of what Roland Barthes has called the classical or "readerly" text, in which the understood project is that of "re-reading" a predetermined text, we may consider Dazai's oeuvre of repeated, abortive, and symbolic suicides an instance of the "writerly" or open-ended text, in which the fending off of narrative closure is itself a constitutive part of the project of writing and reading both.[22] This characteristic tendency of Dazai's art may be said to derive from a vision of reality that is fundamentally at odds with the components of Japan's dominant historical narrative of the first half of the twentieth century, and in this sense Dazai's work (as well as the enduring popular and critical interest in it throughout the postwar) suggests a strain of subversion.

The problematic is cogently expressed by Mikhail Bakhtin: "Reality that is unrefracted and, as it were, raw is not able to enter into the content of literature."[23] Dazai's visceral sense is precisely to maintain his reality as raw and unrefracted as he can, but still to communicate the existence of that "other" reality. A similar perception is proposed in Jameson's formulation of history as "absent cause," with the consequence for literature that it serve, if not as a vessel for raw reality, perhaps as a monitor on which the "refracted" traces of history can be brought up.[24] For Dazai, the trace monitor is the narrator-personae mechanism inhabiting his various works. The instability of this multiplicity of narrative personae is not a weakness or failure on the author's part, as certain critical paradigms of coherence would judge; rather, it is an effect of the resistance to that process of "refraction" spoken of by Bakhtin. The appeal of the fragment as a literary vehicle for Dazai is linked to his desire to effect a radical deconstruction of an individual "self" that is increasingly seen to be as much a socio-historical "body" as it is an individual subject constituted by language. In his "An Almanac of Agony," in a manner not unlike Barthes in his own autobiographical text,[25] Dazai finds the fragment a congenial mode because it appears to subvert the totalizing tendency of logocentric language, and thus to counter the oppressive force of universalizing thought and its ideology of the homogeneous social body.

> In the following I propose to record fragmentarily only those facts that I cannot forget. Those thinkers who seek to stitch together these fragments

are devoting themselves to the manufacture of false and misleading explanations. Philistines appear to find these pernicious, fabricated explanations, which fill the gaps [*kangeki*] between the fragments, irresistibly gratifying, for they respond with effusive praise and applause. I am irritated no end by such manifestations. (204)

These recollections of my reading experience shall remain fragmentary. There is no use in trying to twist them into a coherent meaning, as this will only produce lies. (207)

Well, then, what finally happened to those democratic inclinations of mine? Nothing at all. They seem to have just died out. As I've already said, I do not propose here to report on the social conditions of those days. I only intend to try to set out the fragments of my physical impressions. (207)

During the immediate postwar years, Dazai vociferously attacked the advocates of "new" thought in politics, academia, and literature. He characterized the object of his dislike as "salon hypocrisy," by which he meant the tendency of intellectuals to switch, with little or no self-consciousness, from their prewar and wartime support of Japan's ultranationalistic ideology to the democracy in vogue under the American Occupation. In "For Fifteen Years," Dazai makes a point of distinguishing himself from those "new-style opportunists who, as soon as the war was over, run around shouting 'I never wanted the war. I was opposed to the militarists—I'm a liberal,' who badmouth [General] Tōjō and rant on about war responsibility and the like."[26] In the postwar present "even socialism has degenerated into salon thought." But Dazai refuses to follow the vogue any more than he did the opposite trends before and during the war. "During the war, I made known, to one and all, my disgust with Tōjō and my scorn for Hitler" (224). And now that more people are speaking disparagingly of the Emperor, "I realize just how deeply I have come to love him. I announced myself as a conservative to my friends" ("An Almanac of Agony," 212).

The hypocrisy that is Dazai's target here is related to the totalizing tendency he perceives and rejects among "thinkers" and "historians" who seek to construct a coherent narrative of Japanese history and individual biographies. In both cases, the result is an exclusivity that denies all that does not fit into the preconceived framework, from the eccentricity of the individual to those silent gaps or interstices (*kangeki*) between the fragments. To those "historians" who seek to enclose thought in a hermetic pattern he opposes his persona as a man of the people.

I am a writer of the streets. The stories I tell never go beyond the small individual history that is myself. There may be those who are impatient with this, who put it down as laziness, or ridicule it as low-class, but when posterity comes looking for the trends of thought of these times of ours, these

> individual fragmentary life sketches that we always seem to be writing may prove to be more reliable than the tomes of those so-called historians.
>
> ("An Almanac of Agony," 203)

Ultimately the authenticity of history can be preserved only through the salvaging of the traces of a personal subjective history and a refusal to allow it to be recuperated and integrated into a public official history with its own demands. "For this reason, I will here set down my individual history without regard for the cross-examining and conclusion-oriented prerogatives of each and every type of social philosophy" ("An Almanac of Agony," 203).

In his characterization of "thinkers," Dazai is particularly scornful of what he considers their efforts to locate a "turning point" (*tenki*) in one's life or thought. The notion of a "turn" here may be assimilated to the paradigmatic Eriksonian "identity crisis," with its concomitant suggestion of rebirth, and to its analogous structural role in biographical or autobiographical narrative. The role of the "turning point," then, must be shown to be no more than a narrative device. The implications of this are extended to the level of public or national history, where they assume particular significance in the postwar period.

> Whenever I read the memoirs or manifestoes of so-called "thinkers" writing about their intellectual development, in which they tell us "why I became an advocate of this or that doctrine," I find it so patently false I can't stand it. Invariably, in the process of coming to adopt a particular cause, they pass through some kind of a turning point. Moreover, this turning point is usually dramatic and profoundly emotional.
>
> To me this comes across as gross fabrication. As much as I struggle to believe in it, my senses refuse to comply. In fact, I find myself dumbstruck when confronted with these dramatic turning points. I get goose pimples.
>
> ("An Almanac of Agony," 203)

Juxtaposed to Dazai's denial of historical change and his belief in the noniterability of history, located respectively at the beginning and end of "An Almanac of Agony," this further rejection of change, conceived of as a dramatic turning point in the intellectual life of the individual, reinforces the notion of writing as "an interface" between the private world of the individual and public history. As a narrative device, the "turning point" appears to the writer Dazai as "nothing more than a clumsy distortion" (*kojitsuke*), and he, in his own preferred fragmentary mode, is determined to eliminate precisely this type of "transparent distortion" (204). It is in this sense that Dazai answers the hypothetical historians seeking to construct the history of his thinking: "I don't have any thought. I have only likes and dislikes." And when they persist in asking,

"But in what form did that democratic thought of your youth subsequently develop?" he answers with a "stupid expression on my face, 'Gee, I really don't know what ever happened to it' " (204).

The denial of change does not, however, negate the desire for change. To the contrary, it is its absence, its impossibility that energizes the desire for and efforts toward change and revolution. The insistence on this very paradox, moreover, is what lends Dazai's writing its urgency and immediacy in the turbulence of 1945 and 1946.

> I eagerly await the emergence of a truly new stream of thought. More than anything else, it takes "courage" to propose something truly new. The situation I now envision derives from the perception of the French *moralistes*; I locate my ethical model in the Emperor and project for us an anarchistic utopia of self-sufficiency and independence. ("An Almanac of Agony," 212)

Whether or not the above represents a proto-fascist appeal of the Wyndham Lewis type,[27] which would help to explain Dazai's antileft vehemence after the war, it does call attention to his sense, alluded to here tangentially in the expression "self-sufficient and independent" (*jikyū jisoku*), that utopia may have to be, in Barthes's (via Fourier's) terms, a place where "il n'y aurait plus que des différences."[28] The appeal of such a utopia, in which the individual is free to be different from every other individual self, is a reaction to the collectivist, conformist ideal of a universalizing Marxism; but it is also, perhaps even more so, a neo-Romantic revolt against the alienating reification of life under modern capitalism. The Emperor, in this view, may be seen as the personification of difference, and as such the ultimate model for an ethics based on difference rather than conformity.

Dazai's view of the Emperor here as symbol and vehicle for an ethics of difference is clearly differentiated from the prewar view of the Emperor as a transcendent divinity. "An Almanac of Agony" ends on a note of familiar affection for a now human emperor as ethical paragon, but it begins, as does "Reminiscences," with a recollection of how family and society imposed conformity and hypocrisy on a four-year-old child in the inculcation of respect (via proper language) for the "living god."[29]

Behind this idiosyncratic appeal to a conservatism specifically qualified as "not reactionary but realist" and an ethics based on the Emperor, for "without an object of love, there is the fear that ethics may wander aimlessly in space,"[30] there is, to borrow Akutagawa's term, a "vague anxiety." In Dazai's case, this anxiety is reflected in the implacable humanity with which he must deal. It is the paradox deriving from the persistence of certain human qualities in face of overwhelming pressure to change. And it is the channeling of energy into resistance to change that leads to a utopian resignation in Dazai. The appeals to both Emperor and Chris-

tian love are grounded in a conviction that class and personality differences will not change through rhetoric and political action.

In "An Almanac of Agony" and "For Fifteen Years," the outlines of this vision, perhaps best described as a dark battlefield, may be discerned. They involve a set of oppositions between young and old, and between country and city. The dichotomy between the urban hypocrisy of a cold Tokyo and its literary salons, historians, and thinkers on the one hand, and the vibrant energy of Dazai's home, rural northern Japan, where he returns during the war after fifteen years in Tokyo, will take concrete form in the characters of his fictional works of the next two years. But even in his series of travel accounts and portraits of Tsugaru, the search for a different "self" beneath the veneer of the sophisticated writer becomes apparent. As in his early proletarian writings, the desire to become part of the rising, energized class is strong. In "For Fifteen Years," Dazai rediscovers his "peasant self":

> It had already been fifteen years that I had been away from my hometown, but it hadn't especially changed. And as I walked through those same fields, even I was just an ordinary Tsugaru inhabitant. After fifteen years of living in Tokyo, I wasn't at all like a city dweller. I was, indeed, just a thick-necked blockhead of a farmer. (213)

The essayistic autobiographical "For Fifteen Years" recounts the same events of Dazai's other autobiographical pieces in a smooth syntactical narrative. The thematic focus is on Dazai's "transformation" from a "farmer" into an urban intellectual and on his resurrection of that more authentic earlier self in opposition to the "salon hypocrisy" following the war.

> Maybe I'm only a stupid Tsugaru farmer after all, who doesn't know anything about "culture." The image of me in snowboots trekking through the snow is truly that of a rustic. But what I'm going to do from now on is to remain the totally tactless, bungling, dull-witted, single-minded peasant that I am. If there is any area of self-reliance that I, as I am today, can claim, it is the simple fact of my being a "Tsugaru farmer." (233)

There are, to be sure, echoes here of Dazai's earlier populist yearnings, but there is above all the use of writing to undo the opposition between an urban intellectual and a rural peasant, to dissolve the class contradiction that plagued Dazai since his earliest awakening to class injustice and class struggle. Here in the space of writing, wishful thinking takes on a utopian resonance. This time, however, the object of the poison pen is not the landlord class of rural Tsugaru but the slick intellectuals of Tokyo. And once again, Dazai's dilemma is that he is organically and temperamentally associated with the wrong side.

Dazai thus asserts his fragmentary individual history, associating himself defiantly with the "stupid peasants" of Japan. Coming in the aftermath of a failed war, a destroyed nation, and failed heroes, this transformation back into the persona of the peasant means above all survival. From the death of the nation, from its symbolic suicide, emerges a "self-reliance" based on the minimal fact of being what one is, a survivor.[31] Dazai engineers his suicidal deconstruction via this mystery surrounding survival. The modern metaphor of mass destruction makes all survivors into symbolic suicides by retrospectively recreating the illusion of a choice, the choice of dying. Against the monstrous metaphors of Nazi death camps, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of nuclear disaster, the modern mind, imbued with a vision of cosmic closure, generates a new prototype, "heroes of the minimal, heroes of survival" who are "no longer the old heroes of myth and fable."[32]

In the wake of Japan's monumental defeat in 1945, in the chaos and ruins, physical and moral, Dazai in *The Setting Sun* opposes a minimal survivor's vision of triumph, as with his heroine Kazuko's "personal revolution," against the maximal utopian schemes of radicals and conservatives alike. The narrative of suicide assumes a deconstructive role in the postwar vision of a victimized and helpless Japan. Naoji in his Moonflower Journal contrasts "killing," which is what hypocritical politicians do when they lead people "to die by [sucking them] into acts of desperation," with the integrity of suicide: "No thanks. I had rather die by my own hand."[33] Once again, as with love, Dazai insists on choice and responsibility, not on fate and passivity. This "activist" image of Dazai clashes with the more familiar view of him as a passive decadent, an advocate of an esthetics of failure, whom Mishima scorned for his lack of machismo.

But such views take what are sliding signifiers in Dazai for stable meanings. Love, decadence, and suicide for Dazai are dynamic concepts. Above all they are narrative constructs subject to individual design and will. Thus, Dazai's insistence on an active, willful dying, like his choice to love or not to love, and his decision to commit *tenkō*, confront the Japanese people, and above all the intellectual, with a still-open-ended narrative of their past. In this narrative, it is not possible to institute a simple closure, sealing off and repressing an ugly past. One must confront—and recognize as such—one's choices, including one's role as oppressor, and not "cop out" with a sigh of resignation or a perfunctory mea culpa. And the reason is *not* in order to set the story straight. Rather, it is in order to prepare oneself to deal with the ongoing open-endedness of the present and the future. In order to do so, Dazai argues, one must place oneself at the outer horizons, beyond life and death, and "posthumously" view the future. This is the challenge his suicidal narrative poses

to the Japanese people and the literary establishment, and its impact in the immediate postwar period does not go unnoticed, even if it is subsequently recuperated.

In Chapter Eight, "Japanese *Ressentiment*," the concept of literary suicide (*littératuricide*), introduced earlier in the discussion of Alvarez's study, will be linked in Dazai's writing to the horizons of the immediate postwar episteme. The analysis of Dazai's major novel *The Setting Sun* will focus on its messianic component, including a uniquely skewed vision of revolution and class struggle, as well as an aporetic sense of the gender gap, and will allow us to highlight the dilemma of postwar Japanese literature in its struggle to define itself against a West that is now too much a part of itself. In the final analysis, it will be the literary suicide, with its attendant ambiguity and aura of undecidability, and with its merging and interweaving of modern and premodern (demonic, antirational) urges, that will maintain the open-endedness of the text or of the history in which it is situated.

We will also note how the concept of *ressentiment*, personified first in the form of menacing peasants in "The Courtesy Call," is transmitted via the transferability of roles in the Dazai text, to the author-narrator or third-person surrogates thereof (Naoji, Uehara) in *The Setting Sun*. The related "theory of *ressentiment*," as developed by Fredric Jameson, will be drawn on here to show the role of critics and intellectuals in the process of "repression" when they "write," via their criticism, their own alienation and marginality. In the case of Japan, this intellectual self-perception is extended and identified with a national self-image of a culturally superior but internationally weak Japan in struggle with the powerful West. The shifting of material power balances, whereby Japan tends to remain only peripherally powerful and not benefit from the accoutrements of power, leads to dramatic alternations in the Japan/West or inside/outside opposition, as we shall see in the Epilogue on postmodern Japan.

## *Chapter Eight*

# JAPANESE *RESSENTIMENT*

> Art reflects its society . . . [yet it] also creates elements which society is not able to realize.
> —Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*

THE RECONSTRUCTION of a historical mind-set or perception is itself, to follow Bakhtin's formulation, at best a refraction of an absent reality. As such it is dependent on the material traces that remain. In the case of Dazai and postwar Japan, these traces include a set of fictional and quasi-fictional works, the reading of which will allow us to map out a range of issues relating to postwar Japanese history and literature not readily apparent in existing criticism. The analysis proposed here derives from Fredric Jameson's conceptual apparatus as developed primarily in *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson's work has been ardently discussed across the Marxist and non-Marxist literary spectrum, and few have been as effective as he in showing how reading and writing can be understood as social acts grounded in an individual's relation to those forces of production responsible for his or her existence.[1] This perception derives from Jameson's assertion that "the human adventure is one," to be "retold within the unity of a single great collective story," that "master-narrative" of "the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity" (19).

In this chapter, we will provide a brief account of Jameson's analytical scheme, focusing on his concept of the ideologeme as the "smallest intelligible unit of antagonistic class discourse" (76) and its "fundamental nineteenth-century [European]" manifestation as the " 'theory' of *ressentiment*" (88). We will then consider how this formulation may help "to mediate between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion, class value . . . and the narrative materials" (87) of Dazai's postwar production.

Jameson's scheme of intelligibility of literary and cultural texts involves three frameworks or "semantic horizons," each of which in turn governs the reconstitution or interpretation of textual objects specific to it. The first horizon is that of political history (seen as a chronicle of distinct events), within which the text is identified as an individual literary work and studied as a symbolic art. The second horizon is that of the social order as determined by class struggle. Within this horizon, the text is

now seen as an utterance (*parole*) of a collective class discourse and is studied as a constituent element of the above-defined ideologeme. The third horizon is that of human history itself, in which both individual texts and ideologemes are to be read as the ideology of form, whereby "symbolic messages are transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems" (98–99). Jameson proceeds, in the latter part of *The Political Unconscious*, to illustrate these three methodological transformations, which derive as they do from the attendant historical transformations of their textual objects, in the works of Balzac (realism), Gissing (high naturalism), and Conrad (modernism).

It is Jameson's notion of the ideologeme and its specific manifestation as *ressentiment* in Gissing and Conrad as an element of the transition between realism and modernism that suggests a useful aid for our consideration of modern Japanese literature. The ideologeme, as described by Jameson, is an "amphibious formation," able to appear both as a conceptual or philosophical system, a "pseudoidea," or as a cultural text, a "proto-narrative" (87). It is this bivalent quality presumably that allows it to transform, via narrative, the invisible collective structures of the political unconscious. "The culture or 'objective spirit' of a given period is an environment peopled not merely with words and conceptual survivals, but also with those narrative unities of a socially symbolic type. . . . Such ideologemes are the raw material, the inherited narrative paradigms, upon which the novel as a process works and which it transforms into texts of a different order" (185). And, adds Jameson, it is "our function to reconstruct the ideologeme of the historical period in question" (201).

Thus it is that he identifies *ressentiment*, and the concomitant theme of the alienated intellectual, as an ideologeme basic to late nineteenth-century European capitalism. The abstract "raw material" of *ressentiment* is available in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* where the slaves engineer their uprising against their masters via the "ideological ruse" of ethics: "The slaves infect [the masters] with a slave mentality—the ethos of charity—in order to rob them of their natural vitality and aggressive, properly aristocratic insolence" (201). For Nietzsche, "The slave uprising in ethics begins when *ressentiment* becomes creative and brings forth its own values."[2] *Ressentiment* is thus a surrogate for those, the slaves, who cannot react effectively and who must seek to protect themselves through what Nietzsche calls "the exercise of imaginary vengeance."

It is, however, the use made of this concept by historians to explain revolution that is instructive. On the one hand, suggests Jameson, popular uprisings are seen to derive from the "destructive envy" of the masses, which is to suggest that the hierarchical system is not itself faulty but merely needs adjustment. At the same time, he argues, *ressentiment* also accounts for the role of the intellectual as revolutionary militant:

"Unsuccessful writers and poets, bad philosophers, bilious journalists, and failures of all kinds"—in Nietzsche's words, these "ascetic priests" who appear to "incite an otherwise essentially satisfied popular mass to such 'unnatural' disorder"—are interpreted by the ideologeme of *ressentiment* as maladjusted private individuals (202).

This explanatory capacity of *ressentiment*, its theoretical power, is itself subject to analysis. As a theory that would explain revolution, Jameson finds it "little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation." As such, it leads him to conclude "that the theory of *ressentiment*, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and the production of *ressentiment*" (202). In other words, it is the intellectuals themselves who, in their depiction of popular *ressentiment*, conceptualize a theory of the same that has the effect of disparaging and suppressing the legitimate aspirations of an oppressed class while justifying their own ambiguous, but elite, class status.

Jameson, in his analysis of Gissing, demonstrates how fictional representations of character end up acting out the writer's ambivalence toward *ressentiment*, whereby the effort to "explain" revolution is itself an expression of counterrevolution. In the novel *Demos*, where Richard Mutimer, worker and militant, is given the opportunity to run an uncle's factory and marries out of his class, the proletarian hero is prevented from realizing his social utopian experiment when his bride recovers a lost document restoring the factory to its properly intended aristocratic heir. For Jameson, this conclusion, in which the character is "structurally punished" for an unnatural *déclassement*, is "inescapable": "Gissing resents Richard, and what he resents most is the latter's *ressentiment*" (202), that is, his "desire" to "change things."

In the following analysis of Dazai's postwar writing, I will argue that the ideologeme of *ressentiment*, its autoreferential theory, and its thematic concomitant of the alienated intellectual are all to be found in the structural interplay of Dazai's fictional characters. Two works in particular, "The Courtesy Call" and *The Setting Sun*, are noteworthy for the paradoxical reactions they inspire: to some, Dazai's fiction is eminently representative of the "reality" and social spectrum of postwar Japan; to others, it is somehow lacking in scope, inspiration, and character. This very conjuncture of opposed readings of Dazai will serve as a point of departure and a node of signification for an analysis of *The Setting Sun*. We will be concerned as well with the interplay between text and critic for, as Dazai's fiction demonstrates, the role of the class-conscious intellectual is very much a horizon for his writing. The self-referential play, whereby Dazai's works invoke one or the other of his personae may thus be seen as part of a process of deconstruction of the Japanese I-novel tradition. To the extent that this tradition serves as a legitimation for the

critic's own alienated intellectual status, so does it become susceptible to the explanatory dilemma of *ressentiment*.

## Friendly Dissuasion

"The Courtesy Call" (*Shinyū kōkan*, 1946)[3] provides a portrait of the postwar Japanese peasantry that calls to mind the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Set in Dazai's native Tsugaru, where the author had evacuated with his family during the war, it is a first-person (with Dazai the author's name attached) account of a "visit" by a local rustic named Hirata to the famous writer's home. With dark humor, the narrator develops a chilling portrait of the "guest," who imposes himself in ever-increasing waves of ominous hostility, threatening, or *so it would seem*, to inflict violence or irreparable harm on the narrator and his wife. When all is said and done, however, the harm amounts to several "lies" or distortions, including the assertion of childhood intimacy with the author (whose inability to recall this shared past inclines him to acquiesce in the other's fabrications) and a promise by the guest to reciprocate with generous hospitality (belied by the admission that he has no possessions or wealth).

In sum "The Courtesy Call," whose literal title accentuates the irony by referring to the caller as a "close friend," provides a vignette of the theory of *ressentiment* in postwar Japan. The intellectual, paralyzed by fear of the uncouth peasant, finds himself further trapped by the ideology of Confucian forbearance, which, like Christianity's "turning of the other cheek," should serve rather as testimony to the unassailable superiority of the upper class. The story is at the same time a depiction of the modern author's ambivalent relation to the public, that amorphous repository of readers and fans without which the writer's "author-persona" cannot survive.

Ivan Morris's description of "The Courtesy Call" as "typical of [Dazai's] more lighthearted stories" (translator's preface, 465) dismisses a bit too summarily the undercurrent of fear and panic that energizes this story. It is Morris's subsequent characterization of it, as "a rather refreshing contrast to the sentimental approach that many Japanese writers tend to adopt when describing members of the working class," that raises the suspicion of a theory of *ressentiment* in the making. What is this "refreshing contrast" with if not, one presumes, the proletarian literature of the 1920s and 1930s? And how is the proletarian now portrayed? "The man who came to my house that afternoon last September . . . foretold a new species of humanity. . . . He was far and away the most disagreeable, the most loathsome, person I had ever met, there was not a jot of goodness in him" (465). Hirata is described as a "terrible farmer" (469), having a "large face with shrewd eyes and fleshy lips" (466).

The process of aggressive intimidation of the narrator by his "old friend" is based on lies and threats but above all on a telling familiarity with the narrator's life, writing, and background. Hirata incessantly plays on the hypocrisy of the decadent intellectual esthete, eliciting whiskey from him, humiliating him in front of his wife (" 'Does he know how to make love to you right?' " 475), making him fear for his "property" (which he does not own), and all the while berating him for his libertine habits, lack of active support for his own brother (a politician), his merchant ancestry, and his scholarly pedantry. The accusation of being a "lady-killer" (recalling to the reader Dazai's sordid romantic liaisons) sparks a new sense of indignation in the narrator: "Something about this man's tone made me feel, for the first time in years, that I had to defend myself from the charge of being a callous libertine" (469). Yet, it is the public knowledge of the truth about himself that allows anxiety to be implanted in the narrator's mind.

> "I know all about you," [Hirata] said, looking at me with a snigger, and I realized that he did not believe a word I had said. An unpleasant feeling of cheapness came over me. This man with his ugly mind seemed to see right through me—into the ugliest recesses of my being. (470)

The class nature of the narrator's guilt-ridden anxiety is depicted for the reader as a conscious articulation in his mind, only then in the subsequent exchange to be thrown back at him by the "uneducated" farmer's "research."

> I suddenly wanted to ask him to leave. Yet the fact was that I did not dare to. Our position in this village was far from secure and I could not risk offending someone who appeared to be an old and well-established inhabitant. Besides, I was afraid that if I asked him to go, he might think that I looked down on him for being an uneducated farmer. (470)

Hirata of course reads his mind and retorts:

> Your family may have got ahead in the world now, but a couple of generations ago they were just common oil-sellers. Did you know that? I've been doing a bit of research. Your family used to sell cans of oil and if anyone bought half a pint or more, they gave him a piece of toffee as a premium. That's how they made their money. It's the same with almost all the so-called "good" families. (471)

From the cold shower of economic history, enhanced by the immediate postwar reality of city people being directly dependent on farmers for food (" 'Now I'm the one who's got ahead and they have to come begging me for rice and all the things they can't get in Tokyo.' " [471]), the story

reaches an apogee of anxiety in the narrator's mind, followed by an anticlimactic denouement that restores the reassuring status quo.

In his desperation, the narrator flashes back on the "stories about great men" recounted in his school textbooks on "moral training." These men, "on being abused by unmannerly rogues like this [Hirata], did not answer in kind, but instead displayed their true moral superiority, as well as their fathomless contempt for these ruffians, by forthrightly asking them for forgiveness when by all rights it was they who deserved apology" (476). This virtuous model of behavior is set against the narrator's "horrible vision of our visitor suddenly running amuck and smashing the screens, sliding doors, and furniture. . . . The idea of the terrible ravages that this farmer might now perpetrate made cold shivers run down my spine." Thus it is that "now, unexpectedly, I found myself in the role [of these great men]. All of a sudden I knew the sense of isolation which they too must have felt when being attacked" (477).

In Buraiha fashion, Dazai performs a minor demystification here, as the narrator's lofty vision of heroic forebearance is subtly recast in the form of banal pragmatism.

> It occurred to me that these didactic stories should be classified, not under the usual headings of "Forbearance" or "Great Men and Little Men," but, rather, under "Loneliness." At the same time I perceived that forbearance really had very little to do with the matter. It was simply that these "great men" were weaker than their assailants and knew that they would not stand a chance if it came to a fight.[4] (477)

The result for the narrator-hero is that he too is unable to violate the code (here not of the warrior but of the bourgeois "host"). "At all cost, I thought in my lonely cowardice, I must avoid offending him" (477).

It is at this point of determination "not to offend" on the part of the narrator-host that the rogue-guest closes his eyes and undergoes what appears to be a catatonic fit, only to amaze his hosts by then opening his eyes and speaking "calmly as if nothing whatever had happened" (477). What follows is an invitation by Hirata to visit his home coupled with an admission—contradicting his earlier offer to supply whatever food they might need or desire—that "I've really got nothing in my place, nothing at all." From this point on, the threat subdued, the narrator gradually assumes control, taking care to play the perfect host, but now with accustomed and proper equanimity.

The narrator's penultimate relief (prior to the guest's actual departure) occurs when Hirata proposes to recite a poem "to make you forget your troubles" (479). Eager to see the occasion as a "welcome departure," the narrator hastens to resurrect his image of the Japanese peasantry—appropriately enough for the writer he is—through the lens of literature:

> To hear him recite a poem—perhaps some ancient melancholy verses handed down from generation to generation in this remote little village—might mitigate the picture of unrelieved loathesomeness that I had by now formed of my 'old friend,' a picture that I feared would pursue me to the end of my days. (479)

In familiar fashion, this idyllic restoration of the urban intellectual/rustic peasant opposition is humorously displaced by Hirata's evocation of classical Chinese bloodstained battlefields and an inability to recall more than the first two lines. After having expressed a heartfelt and sincere interest "for the first time that afternoon" (479), "the narrator feels cruelly let down even in the last effort at communication."[5]

In the end, everything fits back into place, as the outcome corroborates the relative positions of the adversaries. Hirata is shown to be the boorish, grasping peasant, able to incite panic in the hearts of his hosts, but ultimately content to insult them (the final flourish being his parting invective: "Don't be so stuck-up") and take their whiskey and cigarettes. Osamu, the narrator, remains secure, if not in his physical and emotional being, then in his reassurance that his perception of human nature is intact.

There is a sense in which this story strives toward allegory in the symbolic sense referred to previously. The specter of a democracy controlled by boors like Hirata is a familiar one, from the time of Confucius and Plato to the Communist Manifesto and to postwar Japan and the West. Dazai's depiction of the theme, not only in "The Courtesy Call" but in *The Setting Sun* as well, calls attention to its pervasiveness, as well as its affinity with that other strand of postwar representation, in which lone individuals are victims of heavy-handed conformism, familiar in the writings and theater of Beckett and Abe Kōbō.[6]

Perhaps it is not an accident that these writers emerge as paradigms of the modern alienated Japanese intellectual. Both Abe, from his youth in the vast spaces of the Manchurian plains to his "Western" urban cosmopolitanism, and Dazai, as the prodigal son, black sheep, and *buraiha* outcast, seem to speak, through their depictions of Japan's plight, above all of the dilemma of the intellectual. Whereas Abe, however, has managed to harmonize his concerns with a degree of political, personal, and artistic success (perhaps a result of a more "laid back" later postwar Japan), Dazai's turbulent intensity coincided with Japan's immediate postwar turmoil, resulting in a somewhat different personal involvement.

Thus do we note in "The Courtesy Call" an ambivalence characteristic of the marginal intellectual and suggestive of the bivalent nature of *ressentiment*. In invoking the tales of heroic forbearance, the narrator reveals that up until that moment, "rather than admire the much-vaunted

patience of these men, I had always tended to despise it as concealing an arrogant sense of superiority; my sympathy had, in fact, been on the side of the so-called rogues, whose behavior was at least natural and unpretentious" (477). Now, in identifying with them, however, he finds himself "forced to carry out a major revision of my earlier views."[7] That revision, as we have seen, is a deconstructive reading of the social code, whereby the paradox of a ruling class ideology becomes apparent. As in Nietzsche's elaboration of the slaves' "ideological ruse," whereby ethics serves to rob the masters of their natural vitality, here too the *ressentiment* of the peasant Hirata is limited to "the exercise of imaginary vengeance." And yet, the narrator Osamu seems dissatisfied, for the experience with Hirata, confirmed as it is as "imaginary," nonetheless pushes him back into his role of oppressor. Osamu is only too aware that the oppressor, the "great man," is in reality weak because he is isolated. The warrior ideology of forbearance, like the Christian doctrine of tolerance, is not just a stratagem for keeping the poor in their place; it is a desperate measure on the part of the rulers to avoid a battle they have no chance of winning. "Isn't that why," queries Dazai, "even Christ, when the odds are against him, makes his escape?"[8]

It is of interest that Dazai includes the figure of Jesus in analogy with the role models of Confucian tradition. The theory of *ressentiment* may help to elucidate Dazai's Christian allusions, which have often puzzled readers of Dazai with perhaps a less Nietzschean view than he. We shall return to this issue in our discussion of *The Setting Sun*, but let us here note only that Dazai's ambivalence toward the figure of Hirata may recall his depiction of himself as a "Tsugaru farmer" in "For Fifteen Years" and presage the more complicated relation between Naoji and Uehara in *The Setting Sun*.

## SUNSET . . . SUNRISE: RE[PRE]SENTING JAPAN

*The Setting Sun*, by the depth of its understanding of the Japanese of today, evokes and reveals aspects of the Japanese nation as a whole. This is why the novel was so successful and so moving to Japanese of all classes.
—Donald Keene, "Introduction," *The Setting Sun*

*The Setting Sun* . . . lacks sufficient scale and the sort of developed attitude toward its society that would provide a powerful and comprehensive vision of postwar Japan.
—Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*

*The Setting Sun* (1947) was widely touted as an accurate portrait of postwar Japan and billed as a "powerful novel of a nation in social and moral crisis [which] probes the destructive effects of war and the transition from a feudal Japan to an industrial society."[9] The heroine, Kazuko, is described as "a young aristocrat who deliberately abandons her class, a symbol of the anomie which pervades so much of the modern world," and the author is said to be a "member of a near-aristocratic family [who] chose to depict the decline of his own class" (xv).

The canonization of this novel as a eulogy for the decline of the Japanese aristocracy and of its author Dazai as a latter-day Japanese Balzac whose writerly sensibility and veracity overcome his class interests has, if anything, become more entrenched in the last forty years. In a vein reminiscent of Lukács's "recuperation" of Balzac for Marxism by way of European "realism,"[10] Donald Keene, writing in 1956, affirms that "it is generally conceded that Dazai is one of the great chroniclers of contemporary Japanese life. . . . I am, in a way, tempted to urge the Western reader to turn to Dazai for an exact picture of what life is like in Japan today" (xviii).

There is a suggestive displacement going on here. Keene qualifies almost every one of his claims for Dazai with a statement recognizing the marginal character of his subject. Thus, Dazai is the great chronicler "despite the shortness of his life and career" (xviii). The reader who is urged to turn to Dazai for an "exact picture" of life in Japan is nonetheless told that "certainly there are other pictures of Japan which can and have been painted of this same period" (xviii). Most significant perhaps is the qualification attached to the novel's revelations about "the Japanese nation as a whole" and its appeal "to Japanese of all classes," for the latter is achieved "despite the specialized area of the subject matter and the deviant behavior of some of its characters" (xviii).

In sum, American criticism has made Dazai into a cultural prototype, an amalgam of nineteenth-century European literary figures (from Balzac and Chekhov to Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine), the mere mention of whose names in a Dazai text is enough to evoke the cultural pedigree of the author-hero and conjure up the paradigm of modern Japan itself. "The people whose lives are described in *The Setting Sun* are . . . typical of modern Japan" (xii). For what we find is most typical of them, and of their chroniclers like Dazai, is the ease with which they assimilate "Western" customs, clothes, and culture: "Kazuko seems more accustomed to wearing Western clothes than kimonos, is reminded as often of Chekhov or Balzac as of *The Tale of Genji*, and if not fluent in any Western language, uses a variety of French and English phrases with certainty that she will be understood by everyone" (xii).[11]

It is not that they relinquish their quintessential Japaneseness, that

elusive "otherness" folded beneath the obscure inner reaches of their psychic and social beings: Kazuko "remains unmistakably Japanese in her relations with the people around her and in her quick emotional responses to the moments of intensity in her life" (xii). Thus it is that critics can have their cake and eat it too. Japanese literature is now worth desiring for its humanistic and universal qualities (i.e., familiar to an educated Western reader), and yet it remains tantalizingly inaccessible, not only through the mystification of language (translatable but not transparent) but, more significant, by appeal to that irascible inscrutability hidden beneath the veneer of modern respectability: "Because family confidences are almost impossible . . . [people] live almost without overt communication with each other" (xiii).[12]

It is, however, via a suggestive misreading of one of the novel's celebrated phrases that we may bring this metacritical beginning/parenthesis to an end and consider the novel from a somewhat different perspective. Kazuko, in her final letter to Uehara, refers to both of them as "victims of a transitional period of morality," to which the critic (Keene) comments: "[A]nd we feel that she is right. A *modus vivendi* with Western things has nearly been achieved, but the full effect of Western ideas has yet to be felt. *The Setting Sun* derives most of its power from its portrayal of the ways in which the new ideas have destroyed the Japanese aristocracy" (xiii). If Dazai and the Buraiha have anything to say, with their anguished, tortured writing, it is, as Kazuko concludes, that ideas do not suffice to bring about revolution. "The old morality persists unchanged in the world around us and lies athwart our way" (173).

The critical view of new ideas winning out against old appears as an instance of hermeneutic closure, one that provides a reading of work, author, and nation (postwar Japan) in an unproblematic manner, and which as a result fails to account for the persistent and troubling energy of this novel. According to this critical narrative, Dazai, suffering from a nostalgic and guilt-ridden obsession with his own "quasi-aristocratic" background and sobered by his abortive left-wing associations in the early 1930s, takes it upon himself to "chronicle the decline of his own class." For critics, this bittersweet swan song, couched in the metaphysics of a Marxian-Christian death and phoenix resurrection, is greeted as a properly estranged (with contemporaneous overtones of Camus's *Stranger*) farewell to feudal miasma and an optimistic, if agnostic, anticipation of a properly bourgeois democratic capitalist Japan. Masao Miyoshi has questioned the ease with which Japan's "largely middle-class critics" accept Dazai's aristocratic affiliations, or at least his "aristocratic consciousness" (*meimon ishiki*) and pretensions, with which they proceed to explain his politics as well as his rebellious personality in general. As Miyoshi points out, and as Dazai's own autobiographical writings attest to, this "upper-

class identification was more dream than reality."[13] The Tsushima family were wealthy landlords in the northern tip of Honshu, but Dazai, in spite of romantic autobiographical reflections on his relations with family servants (as in "Reminiscences"), was far more middle class than noble. Unlike Mishima Yukio, for instance, Dazai did not attend the elite prep school, the Gakushūin, nor did he socialize with the Japanese elite.

For Miyoshi, Dazai's notion of aristocracy, which he sees as the "dominant idea" of *The Setting Sun*, is vague and confused, and to be explained ultimately as a kind of unconscious metaphor. As Miyoshi puts it, a combination of "sneaky regret for not *really* belonging to the actual aristocracy" and an ambiguous sense of genuine spiritual "aristocracy" in his guise as master-artist (*sensei*) is what enables Dazai to engineer his "imaginary leap from the fictional (but in a way real) claim to selection by achievement to the literal (but fake) claim to selection by birth."[14] Ultimately, Miyoshi's incisive portrayal of Dazai and *The Setting Sun*, tailored appropriately to fit his master scheme of the Japanese "dislike of the verbal," must consign Dazai and his writing to their inevitable destiny as "victims" of the Japanese novel and the Japanese language. The result is another instance of "underdevelopment," wherein Dazai's novel is judged to "lack sufficient scale and [a] developed attitude toward its society."

Miyoshi's and Keene's views of *The Setting Sun*, although thus ostensibly opposed, derive from their respective "readings" of the author Dazai. Where Keene discovers a living portrait of Japan from the hand of the realistic chronicler nostalgic for a lost past, Miyoshi sees a partial and distorting view resulting from Dazai's own skewed notion of aristocracy, although he focuses on a key issue here when he explains Dazai's "failure" by what appears to be a theory of *ressentiment*, Dazai's "sneaky regret for not really belonging to the actual aristocracy." This very polarity of views on the author Dazai, in fact, parallels the critics' reading of the characters in the novel and their reading of modern Japanese literature in general. For Keene, it is the character of Kazuko, "who is determined to struggle," that gives the novel its strength, whereas for Miyoshi, the heroine Kazuko "is scarcely brought to life in the novel, being little more than a half-hearted rekindling of the author's by then almost smothered life-force."[15]

Thus it is that *The Setting Sun* fits each critic's evaluation of the Japanese novel. Keene finds it an indication of Japan's success in entering the pantheon of modern literature, "a powerful and brilliant novel by one of the most brilliant of Japanese writers [which] stands as such in the world of literature."[16] Miyoshi finds in it the same "difficulties" and "failures" that characterize Japanese fiction. "*The Setting Sun*, like other typical

Japanese novels, has very little plot: events occur, but with no explicit moral or causal interpretations to account for them."[17]

For both critics, Dazai's texts represent a closure, a congruence of personality and vision. Dazai and his personae are continuous signifiers and signifieds: for the optimists like Keene they represent a single vision of modern development in which the past is chronicled and preserved;[18] for the skeptics like Miyoshi, Dazai is a not-as-yet fully developed personality whose vision is necessarily flawed and fragmented. But, it should be emphasized, the critic's vision is not fragmented; it is coherent and corresponds to his model of what a proper (Western) individual personality should be (see Chapter Two) and in terms of which Dazai's vision should be modified.

Let us now consider *The Setting Sun* not in terms of how its fragments and characters add up to a lifelike picture of postwar Japan through its author/persona Dazai, but rather in terms of how the text may be seen, via its own anomalies, to undo the synthetic thrust of criticism while inevitably making possible the conflicting interpretations that surround it. Dazai's inversion of Flauberian realism, which succeeds at undercutting itself by rendering the narrator less visible and less omniscient, resurrects the narrator as the text's source of authority, not however so as to result in a determination of a coherent story of truth (which Culler designated as Flaubert's failure), but so as to cast doubt on the veracity and consistency of the narrator's voice. This process is most evident in such first-person narrator works as "An Almanac of Agony," "For Fifteen Years," or "Chance," where the narrator undercuts the authority of his own text by a persistent stream of self-referential comments. In "Chance," the narrator's insistence that love is never a matter of chance but of will is argued on the basis of a recounting, with abundant exegesis, of his personal experiences. As if the reader might not already be sufficiently skeptical of the "evidence," the narrator pushes the reader to that point of derision by peppering his text with such reader-directed statements as "I never tell lies. So go ahead and read on to the end" or "Since this story is in no way about one of my past affairs the reader may also relax." Or again, in the midst of a description of his encounter with a romantically inclined geisha, he observes: "Those trashy old geisha romances were filled with such scenes."[19]

But the process is also apparent in such "fictionalized autobiographies" as *No Longer Human* or *The Setting Sun*. The pretense at a "Flaubert-type realism" here is belied either by the flimsiness of the fictional cover, as in the use of a second first-person narrator in *No Longer Human* who presents the reader with the "journals" of the autobiographer, or by its fragmented textuality, as in *The Setting Sun*, where a montage of first-person texts (diaries, letters) and multiple perspectives (Kazuko, Naoji)

nonetheless brings the reader face to face with a problematic narrativity. It is in these works that Dazai's practice of suicidal autobiography comes to its fullest realization, that is, in the coalescence of a narrative that is at one and the same time an account of self-destruction and a self-destructing account.

*The Setting Sun* has four major characters: Kazuko the narrator, Naoji her brother, their mother, and the writer Uehara. The plot revolves around Naoji's and Kazuko's efforts to find meaning and identity in postwar Japan. In the course of the novel, the mother dies, Naoji commits suicide, and Kazuko has herself made pregnant by Uehara.

Naoji's suicide is the structural key: it marks the "last" of the "aristocratic" family line, the last male, and the end of any legitimate continuation; it also marks the release of Kazuko from her struggle with him over the past (relationship with their mother) and the present (Uehara). One of the rarely mentioned aspects of the novel is this tension between brother and sister, their rival claims to their mother as a source of life and inspiration, and the ultimate survival of the sister, recalling the mythic sibling rivalry of the gods Susanoo and Amaterasu. In the latter instance, too, it was the female god of the sun who brought hope and survival to the Japanese people after a period of darkness preceded by the moody destructive behavior of her brother. Here Naoji seals off the story of his and Japan's destructive behavior, the Pacific War, and brings conflict into the domestic hearth. When Kazuko asks him to tell their mother about the South Seas, he replies: "There's nothing to tell. Nothing at all. I've forgotten" (59). The peacefulness of life alone with her mother is now gone: "Once Naoji returned from the South Pacific, our real hell began" (52).

As with the *Kojiki* myth, where it is useful to recall that the sibling rivalry may mask a conflict of early cultures in which to the victor went the power to write history, so here too it is the "survivor" Kazuko who "writes" the narrative. But, again, as in the *Kojiki*, the *Tale of the Heike*, and other accounts of civil conflict, the vanquished tend to emerge as "noble failures."[20] If *The Setting Sun* is interpreted, as it is by so many, as an "elegy mourning the death of the nobility in twentieth-century Japan," then Dazai's remark that "Literature is always a *Tale of the Heike*" stands for the "fall of good but weak people . . . nobly meeting a tragic fate at the hands of their inferiors."[21]

There are two dilemmas raised by the novel that concern us here: Is Naoji's self-destruction that of a victim or of an oppressor? And is Kazuko's act of willful conception (the opposite of self-destruction, i.e., adding life) a sign of *resignation* (life must go on, regardless of defeat and ugliness) or of *hope* (optimism for the future)? Both these questions relate to the issue of reading and interpretation, not just in the text but in the way

the novel as well as Dazai are "read into" Japanese history and modern Japanese literature.

Naoji as victim is a way of seeing Japan as victim of its own background. Thus, it is possible to repress and not see the actual strength of the Japanese ruling class and its irresponsibility both in Asia and at home. It is noteworthy that Naoji is a drug addict (switching from drugs to alcohol is a subtle distinction, engineered by Uehara, which sugarcoats the same phenomenon), for it is his role to "forget" what he witnessed abroad, as the Japanese public were allowed to forget or be ignorant of the oppression carried out in their name. For the agent of oppression to be seen as victim, or scapegoat, allows the majority to relieve itself of guilt.

The suicide, however, is also a key. Naoji is seen as the prototypical decadent (a young Dazai), whose inherent and inherited inability to act specifically marks him for (self-) destruction. Kazuko, meanwhile, is the survivor: although tainted by her class background and her nostalgic desire for a disappearing world, she is, as a woman, able to seek out beyond herself, her family, and her background, to a world that is hostile but at least alive. There is a dialectic here that critics have seen echoed in Dazai's references to Marx and Jesus, and which is encoded in the novel's very title. The process of decline and rebirth is played out in a surrogate dynamic extending from the aristocratic mother through the brother–sister relation, and via the outer circuit of Uehara and his wife, to the unborn baby within Kazuko, and which can be traced through the representation of *ressentiment* in the novel.

## Peasantly Intellectual: The Dilemma of *Ressentiment*

The availability of *ressentiment* as an ideologeme in *The Setting Sun* is most evident in the treatment of Uehara, wherein this unsympathetically drawn peasant intellectual becomes the progenitor of Japan's aristocratically derived future destiny. Uehara recalls the image of the vital, dynamic but coarse and threatening peasant of Dazai's imagination in such postwar works as "For Fifteen Years," *Tsugaru*, and "The Courtesy Call." But Uehara offers a somewhat different version. As a concretization of Dazai's desire to rediscover the lost "peasant" within himself, Uehara is a blend of Osamu (Shūji) and Hirata of "The Courtesy Call," and as such, and in the way he is read by Naoji and Kazuko, a reaffirmation of the staying power of *ressentiment* in the postwar period.

Uehara is an arresting mix of intellectual and peasant. He is a writer, and hence a reader, and yet in this novel he reads only by being read by Kazuko. The parasite and profiteer, Uehara remains hostile or at best indifferent to the ideals of the dead Naoji and to the hopes of the preg-

nant Kazuko. He allows himself to be "read" as an object of love and as an agent of *ressentiment*. And in this he is a depiction of the postwar writer, caught up in change but unaffected by it.

As Jameson argues, the presence of *ressentiment* on the part of the disaffected calls forth a theory of *ressentiment* on the part of author, critic, and bourgeois. This reactive process is seen in the text between Naoji and Uehara, but it is also apparent in critics' identification of Dazai with his characters. Uehara is a hybrid whom they associate with Dazai, but who also makes them uneasy. There is in or through Uehara a fusion of classes, of aristocratic elegance and peasant vitality, as well as a merging of Japanese and Western cultural modes. And one detects in certain criticism of Dazai the ultimate immiscibility of these components, such that the mixture seems impure and unacceptable. There is a need to separate out the right, the good, and the dominant, or, as in the case of Keene and Rimer, to dilute the mix in a larger pool of universalism, humanism, or modernism.

Part of the reason for this underlying uneasiness is the reluctance to recognize Japan's postwar need to modify its narrative to include not only class conflict but military, economic, and cultural imperialism, metaphorically bracketed in *The Setting Sun* by Naoji's opium-induced forgetting of the South Seas. As has been implied by Japanese critics like Oda Makoto and Shimizu Akira, Japan's ideologemes may differ from those of both the West and the third world because of the way in which Japan has, as a nation, been a victim of as well as a collaborator in Western imperialism.[22] For postwar capitalist Japan, this schizophrenic history remains unresolved by efforts to "homogenize" the nation via modernization or postmodernization rhetoric. And the appeal and threat of a fusion of classes and cultures remains a critical component of postwar intellectual life.[23]

*The Setting Sun* thus incorporates the multiple "strands of suffering" drawn out by Dazai in "An Almanac of Agony" and "For Fifteen Years." Above all, it crystallizes that "theory" of *ressentiment* that is generated by the articulate fringe of Japan's middle class, and it proposes a possible "solution," that of *déclassement* (abandonment of one's class and integration into another), only to reject it as an impossibility. What is perhaps more evident here in *The Setting Sun*, however, and made clearer by the postwar perspective, is that *déclassement* through "love" or "moral revolution" is inadequate because it is individual and not collective. It remains, in Kazuko's words, "my revolution" and can produce only "bastard children" and "victims." But it is also doomed because it is but the isolated workings of fringe elites, avant-gardes, artists, and intellectuals out of sympathy and out of touch with the deeper throes of class struggle beneath the surface.

> The revolution must be taking place somewhere. . . . However much the waves on the surface of the sea may rage, the water at the bottom, far from experiencing a revolution, lies motionless, awake but feigning sleep. (173)

Let us examine more closely the dilemma posed by *ressentiment* in *The Setting Sun*. As we have noted, the opposition between Osamu and Hirata in "The Courtesy Call" has been collapsed into the figure of Uehara. Yet simultaneously and prior to this, it has been transformed into an opposition between Naoji and Uehara. Though both men are "artists," they are still separated by their class backgrounds. A classical statement of *ressentiment* is voiced by Uehara.

> I don't like the aristocracy. There's always a kind of offensive arrogance hovering around them. Your brother Naoji is a great success for an aristocrat, but every now and then even he displays an affectation I simply can't put up with. I am a farmer's boy. . . . You aristocrats are not only absolutely incapable of understanding our feelings, but you despise them. (146–147)

Naoji, in his Testament, reveals a similar hostility toward the country artist, presumably Uehara.

> His only assets are the shamelessness of the country boor, a stupid confidence, and a sharp talent for business. . . . Although he is fond of ranting on about the agonies he suffers in his life of decadence, in point of fact he is just a stupid country bumpkin who realized his dreams by coming to the big city and scoring a success on a scale quite unimagined even to himself. (165)

More to the point, Naoji, having been frustrated in his own efforts at *déclassement*, develops an intriguing "theory of *ressentiment*" as a prelude to his suicide. Naoji's abortive *déclassement* stemmed from a fear of and consequent desire to become "a friend of the people," a psychological process already familiar in "The Courtesy Call."

> When I entered high school and first came in contact with friends of an aggressively sturdy stock, boys who had grown up in a class entirely different from my own, their energy put me on the defensive. . . . I wanted to become coarse, to be strong—no, brutal. I thought that was the only way I could qualify myself as a "friend of the people." Liquor was not enough. I was perpetually prey to a terrible dizziness. That was why I had no choice but to take drugs. I had to forget my family. I had to oppose my father's blood. I had to reject my mother's gentleness. I had to be cold to my sister. I thought that otherwise I would not be able to secure an admission ticket for the rooms of the people. (154)

What is most interesting here is that Naoji's effort at *déclassement* did not fail so much as it was only partially realized.

I became coarse. I learned to use coarse language. But *it was half—no, sixty percent*—a wretched imposture, an odd form of trickery. As far as the "people" were concerned, I was a stuck-up prig who put them all on edge with my affected airs. They would never really unbend and relax with me. On the other hand, *it is now impossible for me to return* to those salons I gave up. *Even supposing that my coarseness is sixty percent artifice, the remaining forty percent is genuine now.* The intolerable gentility of the upper-class salon turns my stomach, and I could not endure it for an instant. And those distinguished gentlemen, those eminent citizens, as they are called, would be revolted by my atrocious manners and soon ostracize me. *I can't return to the world I abandoned,* and all the "people" give me (with a fulsome politeness that is filled with malice) is a seat in the visitor's gallery.

(155, emphasis added)

Thus Naoji's dilemma is that he is a half-breed, a part of two worlds but belonging to neither. Who, indeed, is more outcast than the half-breed? And who is more resentful of their own alienation than "intellectuals perpetually suspended between two social worlds and two sets of class values and obligations?"[24] Yet, unlike the fiction of nineteenth-century England, the object of attack in *The Setting Sun* is not Uehara, the proletarian intellectual, but the abstract rhetoric of equality.

All men are alike.

What a servile remark that is. An utterance that degrades itself at the same time that it degrades men, lacking in all pride, seeking to bring about the abandonment of all effort. Marxism proclaims the superiority of the workers. It does not say that all men are the same. Democracy proclaims the dignity of the individual. It does not say that they are all the same. Only the lout will assert, "Yes, no matter how much he puts on, he's just a human being, same as the rest of us."

Why does he say "same?" Can't he say "superior"? The vengeance of the slave mentality!

The statement is obscene and loathesome. I believe that all of the so-called "anxiety of the age"—men frightened by one another, every known principle violated, effort mocked, happiness denied, beauty defiled, honor dragged down—originates in this one incredible expression. (155–157)

If Hirata in "The Courtesy Call" is the personification of *ressentiment*, here we have the ideologeme's abstract enunciation, of its theory, in more explicit terms than Gissing or Jameson himself might render it, and with due reference to Nietzsche. For Naoji is not a "closet" master. He is the self-proclaimed aristocrat infected by the poison of the slave's vengeance; he is a knowing victim of the ideology of equality and humanity. "I am weak. There must be a deficiency somewhere. . . . Perhaps that is

a sign of the impotence of pleasure. . . . Is it our fault that we were born aristocrats?" (157–158). What is more, the barb of the rhetorical lance of equality is poisoned by its marked working-class origin, and more by the ultimate anonymity of its genesis.

> I don't believe that the person who first thought up this extraordinary expression was a religious man or a philosopher or an artist. The expression assuredly oozed forth from some public bar like a grub, without anyone's having pronounced it, an expression fated to overturn the whole world and render it repulsive. This astonishing assertion has absolutely no connection with democracy, or with Marxism for that matter. Without question it was the remark at a bar hurled by an ugly man at a handsome one. It was simple irritation, or, if you will, jealousy, and had nothing to do with ideology or anything of the kind. (155–156)

This rhetorical abstraction in *The Setting Sun*, in Naoji's Journal and Testament, acts as a metaphor for the writer's painful awareness of alienation, not just in his status as social marginal, but in his perception of the "structural alienation inherent in writing and linguistic production."[25]

The notion of *littératuricide* or symbolic suicide, introduced earlier, suggests itself as a means of bridging both the alienation posed by an unbridgeable class gap and that gap apparent in writing and linguistic production. The mechanism will involve the symbolic or ritual destruction of vital powers in order to enable their actual transferal to another and to the future. And it is the women in the text who provide the necessary energy and conductivity for it to happen. Naoji's and Kazuko's mother, the "last noblewoman in Japan," is the source of aristocratic goodness and elegance that has produced and continues to sustain Naoji. Her vital energy is metaphorically, via the ominous snake symbolism, drained from her by Kazuko, who then acts as the key mechanism for transformation in the novel. In the first stage, she sucks her mother's energy and becomes part peasant herself.

> Mother pretends to be happy, but she grows thinner by the day. And in my breast a viper lodges which fattens by sacrificing Mother, which fattens however much I try to suppress it. (27)

> Mother's health has shockingly deteriorated while I, quite on the contrary, feel as though I am steadily turning into a coarse, low-class woman. I can't escape the feeling that it is by sucking the life-breath out of Mother that I am fattening. (42)

Part of this process has involved Kazuko's increasing awareness of being dependent on and beholden to the peasants. The accidental fire she caused in Izu crystallized this perception. "Ever since my disgraceful act

of having started a fire, I have felt somehow as if the color of my blood has turned a little darker, as if I am becoming everyday more of an uncouth country girl" (36).

In the subsequent stage, Kazuko catalyzes the kinetic displacement of aristocratic energy by metaphorically substituting her own unborn baby, conceived with Uehara, for the desired and unrealizable issue of Naoji and Uehara's wife Suga. The unwitting "*destinataire*" of this process, Suga, is first described by Kazuko as "an unusually sweet person" whose tolerance and goodness in the face of Uehara's cruel neglect is the epitome of classic forbearance (133–134). Indeed, Kazuko's own sense of guilt and anticipated hostility as a "rival" for her husband's affections is dissipated by the sense of shared oppression that emanates from her, so that "I considered rushing into the darkness of the sitting room to clutch Mrs. Uehara's hand in mine and weep with her" (134).

But it is Naoji's long discourse of praise for Suga that hints at the survival of the noble blood. First, a telling physical description insists on the purity of race and culture.

> Her eyes are the true Japanese shape, like an almond, and she always wears her hair (which has never been subjected to a permanent) in a very conservative Japanese style, tightly pulled back from her face. Her clothes are shabby but spotless and worn with real distinction. (161–162)

Beneath the surface, too, Suga conveys, silently through her eyes and facial expression, those ultimate signs of Japanese aristocratic gentility, a "genuinely unself-conscious smile" (134) and a "lovable" expression of "honesty" (162) that Naoji unerringly equates with his dead mother, that "last noblewoman."

> You might even describe [Suga's eyes] as "noble." I can only say with certainty that none of the aristocrats among whom we lived—leaving Mama aside—was capable of that unguarded expression of "honesty." (163)

## A JAPANESE *LITTÉRATURICIDE*

*The Setting Sun* thus contains a utopian impulse that underlies the ideologeme of *ressentiment* and alienation upon which it is structured. The transfer of energy across the gap of class, gender, and linguistic alienation parallels a pattern of *littératuricide* whereby Romantic creativity does not die but is salvaged, or recycled, via older, drunken, drugged, or living corpses in order to reemerge ultimately in a new vital form and body. In the novel, we find a fictional analogy to the paradigms of Alvarez's *The Savage God.* Naoji is the classic Romantic suicide, Uehara the prototyp-

ical *littératuricide*, and Kazuko (with perhaps author Dazai) the near or "undecidable" literary suicide, like Sylvia Plath and Alvarez himself.

Naoji commits suicide with a Romantic flourish, yet his creative powers live on through the *littératuricide* Uehara, the dissipated writer who is slowly dying, and through his progeny via Kazuko/Suga. In genuine Romantic fashion, with vipers sucking lifeblood and summer flowers summoning aristocrats to their deaths, we have physiological congruence with social and creative lethargy. Says Naoji, "It may be true that in any society defective types with low vitality like myself are doomed to perish, not because of what they think or anything else, but because of themselves" (155).

Uehara, on his part, introduces by way of analogy with his own waning creative powers the quintessential Western *littératuricide* in the following exchange initiated by Kazuko:

> "How is your work coming?"
>
> "No good. Whatever I write now is stupid and depressing. The twilight of life. The twilight of art. The twilight of mankind. What bathos!"
>
> "Utrillo," I murmured before I knew it.
>
> "Yes, Utrillo. They say he's still alive. A victim of alcohol. A corpse. His paintings of the last ten years have been incredibly vulgar and worthless without exception."
>
> "It's not only just Utrillo, is it? All the other masters too."
>
> "Yes, they've all lost their vitality. But the new shoots have also lost their vitality, blasted in the bud. Frost. It's as though an unseasonable frost had fallen all over the whole world." (145)

This exchange takes place the night that Kazuko conceives with Uehara and on which Naoji commits suicide. In the (listless) spirit of "littératuricidal" creation, Kazuko is not conscious when she achieves her "victory": "I don't know when it happened, but I opened my eyes to find him lying next to me" (149). Moreover, once it is over, not only is her love "extinguished," but Uehara is already as good as dead: "When the room became faintly light, I stared at the face of the man sleeping beside me. It was the face of a man soon to die. It was an exhausted face" (150).

It is Kazuko who is the "survivor," however, and who, like Alvarez, will bring forth a child/text amalgam of its two fathers, Naoji and Uehara. But Kazuko, therefore, must, like Alvarez, also have come back from death. And indeed she has. After the move to Izu, she shared her mother's feeling of having died and been reborn in a different persona. " 'God killed me, and only after he made me into someone entirely different from the person I had been, did he call me back to life' " (26). Upon reflection, Kazuko finds that, "Just as [Mother] said, we have already died, only to come back to life as different people" (27).

The *littératuricide* only appears to lose his or her powers of creativity. In the case of Alvarez, we have rather a survival of the artist with retention of those powers. Kazuko offers a feminist paradigm for this process when, at age twenty-nine, she reflects on what it means for a woman to turn thirty.

> Thirty. "Something of a maiden's fragrance lingers with a woman until she is twenty-nine, but nothing is left about the body of the woman of thirty years." At the sudden recollection of these words from a French novel I had read long ago, I was assailed by a melancholy I could not drive away. . . . I wondered if the maiden fragrance of my body was fading away with each bracelet, necklace, and dress that I sold. A wretched, middle-aged woman. And yet, even a middle-aged woman's life contains a woman's life, doesn't it? That is what I have come of late to understand. (87)

What enables Kazuko to survive is a newly "mature" understanding, stemming from both age and experience. It is one in which the passions of youth and creativity, like the sad beauty of the dying aristocrats, will be, however, extinguished. Love will exist, but it will be of a different kind.

The *littératuricide* is, after all, a survivor, but the survivor that Kazuko must become is different, positing a not always pretty vision.

> I must go on living. And, though, it may be childish of me, I can't go on in simple compliance. From now on I must struggle with the world. I thought that Mother might well be the last of those who can end their lives beautifully and sadly, struggling with no one, neither hating nor betraying anyone. In the world to come there will be no room for such people. The dying are beautiful, but to live, to survive—those things somehow seem hideous and contaminated with blood. I curled myself on the floor and tried to twist my body into the posture, as I remembered it, of a pregnant snake digging a hole. But there was something to which I could not resign myself. Call it low-minded of me, if you will, I must survive and struggle with the world in order to accomplish my desires. Now that it was clear that Mother would soon die, my romanticism and sentimentality were gradually vanishing, and I felt as though I were turning into a calculating, unprincipled creature. (124–125)

Notwithstanding all attempts to portray her as a symbol of hope and revolution, Kazuko's role is still limited to a vicarious function and vision. Her own "hope" for the future does not envisage the autonomous or collective actions of independent individuals, but the role of aphrodisiac to a decrepit artist. In reflecting on the proposal of a widower artist over sixty, "The thought occurred to me that if through my strength the work

of so great an artist could really be rejuvenated, this too would certainly be a reason to go on living" (86).

Kazuko's "revolution" is sad—at best existential—since it remains a purely subjective personalized nonconformist morality. Verbalized as "my moral revolution," it suggests the consciousness within which change appears minimally possible. It is no coincidence that Kazuko's ideas and inspiration for revolution come from books. All of her relations to people and views of herself are no less inspired by literary and artistic prototypes or associations. Her notion of aristocratic behavior derives from a book she is reading on the French monarchy (6). She sees Uehara as Chekhov (83) and Utrillo (145), the elder artist as Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard* (88), her Marxist girlfriend as a Mona Lisa (113), and her dead mother as Mary in a Pietà (128); she compares herself to Nina in *The Sea Gull* (89), to a court lady in *The Tale of Genji*, and is compared to the "spineless girl in the *Sarashina Diary*" (112–113).

Perhaps the two most important references mentioned by Kazuko are Rosa Luxemburg (111, 129) and Jesus (79, 129–131), in whom we find a structural opposition in Kazuko's slogan of "love and revolution" (114, 129, 135). What appeals to Kazuko is not Rosa's science of economics but her goal (revolution) and her means (undivided love, passion). As Kazuko puts it, in order to create one must destroy, and to carry through destruction, which is inevitably tragic, piteous, and beautiful, there must be love. Whether it is a love of God, as in the case of Jesus and his disciples, or a love of the masses, as in Marx's and Rosa's case, revolution and reconstruction of self and society are the goal, and love is a necessary catalyst.

> The dream of destroying, building anew, perfecting. Perhaps even, once one has destroyed, the day of perfecting may never come, but in the passion of love I must destroy. I must start a revolution. (112)

Yet love is hardly a homogeneous concept. Indeed, revolution is a product of a dilemma in which one love is pitted against another. With Christianity, the individual must oppose love of God to love of family and love of self; in revolution, the committed must also sacrifice self and family for class or state. Kazuko quotes Jesus to this effect:

> For I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (130)

It is in sum a love that transcends the self, that pits the Other and its dynamic representation against a static concept of self. For it is history as

the unfolding of past and future struggles and revolutions that demands a radical desubjectivization of the self, which cannot, however, be fully conscious of this process.

> I am she who could destroy her body and soul in Gehenna for the sake of a love, for the sake of a passion she could not understand. (131)

There is also that other "love," the physical sexual variety, which is, after all the primordial mechanism of change and reproduction for living species, and without which there is neither evolution, revolution, self, or other. And there is a dichotomy, with its inevitable hierarchy, established by humans between the spiritual transcendent variety of love, which we may call *agape*, and its more primitive, repressed counterpart, *eros*. The irony is not lost on Kazuko that it is *agape*, in its aspiration toward ultimate cosmic union, that leads rather to struggle and conflict. And it is the opposition within love here that she seeks to undo. Like Dazai's narrative voice in "Chance," Kazuko collapses the hierarchy between *agape* and *eros*. "Why is physical love bad and spiritual love good? I don't understand. I can't help feeling they are the same (131).

For Kazuko, both the passion of love (*agape*) of Rosa Luxemburg and Christianity and the passion of sex (*eros*) have that critical ingredient, which is the power to destroy (and hence to rebuild). But, whereas the loves of economic and spiritual revolution (Marxism and Christianity) rely on abstractions (utopic visions of humanity, "true Gods"), Kazuko's "personal revolution" reduces itself to individual sexuality. Moreover, as Dazai's text demonstrates, this *eros* is only a ruse, necessary because of the individual's incapacity to deal in a concrete and vital way with abstractions. *Eros* is in itself not a goal, any more than is revolution for its own sake. Each concept must be attached to specific individuals with specific histories, which, however, are ultimately discarded.

Thus, the "rainbow" of desire in Kazuko's heart shifts from its first appearance in her letter, where it is a "faint, pale" impression left by Uehara, suggestive only of a potential for love or passion (83), to a "rainbow of revolution" standing for the "strength" that has accrued to Kazuko by the carrying out of her "personal moral revolution" (174). As we have seen, this revolution through love has at the same time involved a process of death, of sucking the life out of all the characters in the novel closest to her (i.e., Mother, Naoji, and Uehara). It has at the same time involved a demystification and deromanticization of love itself, most apparent in Kazuko's "littératuricidal" transformation into a mature woman over thirty, capable now of separating *eros* from *agape*, as she was advised to do years before by her teacher, an Englishwoman: " 'You should never fall in love. Love will bring you unhappiness. if you must love, let it be when you are older, after you are over thirty' " (88).

## Impossible Loves

The novel in Japan as in the West rises with the concept of individualism, whose personification, the Romantic hero, is defined in relation to his success or failure at love. Romantic love is the great transformer, the catalyzer of individual consciousness, of subjectivity wherein the self is defined by relation to the Other. Dazai's early work "Reminiscences" provides an example of this self-conscious process in the narrator's infatuation, and the distancing of that infatuation, with Miyo. Revolution functions analogously at the level of societal change, where it is the mechanism for transforming the social body and its collective consciousness.

At the level of narrative, these paradigms become the texts of individuals or of social collectives, each with their own distinctive structures. Romantic love involves the anguished soul seeking to overcome the gap between a desiring subject and a desired object. Revolution as a narrative paradigm depicts a social class, or representative thereof, whose perception of injustice between its situation and that of others leads it to struggle against the system or another class in an effort to eliminate that gap or fulfill its own desire for power.

The Romanticism associated with love and revolution relies heavily on a sense of predestination, of fate, from which Dazai himself is hardly free.[26] Yet, although Dazai ironically and self-consciously draws parallels with European Romantics, libertines, and *littératuricides*, there is a move in these works to resist the shaping power of the Romantic paradigm. It is in this light that we may see his rejection of the concept of destiny as an element structuring romantic love in "Chance," where the opposition between *agape* (*ai*) and *eros* (*koi*) is collapsed in explicit terms.

> There is no small number of people who endeavor to teach us that life, marriage, and love (*ren'ai*) are all matters of chance. But I don't see it that way. . . . at least in the case of love it is not a matter of chance. I believe it to be a question of will power.[27]

After demolishing the dictionary definition of love ("An emotion of affection between a man and a woman arising from sexual attraction; specifically, a sexual love stemming from a desire to join physically with a person of the opposite sex whom one loves"), Dazai gives his own definition:

> If I were a compiler of that dictionary, I would define "love" as follows: "A newly concocted cultural euphemism for the concept of lust. Sexual passion between a man and a woman. Concretely, a specifically sexual anguish stem-

ming from the struggle to join physically with one or several members of the opposite sex."[28]

In *The Setting Sun*, the critical events relating to love and death also take place not by chance but by willful deliberation, or, alternately, do not take place or realize their potential by a willful lack of effort. Kazuko, almost aided as it were by Uehara's lack of response, pursues *eros* and with it her "personal revolution." As in "Chance," here too both sex and male–female relations are deromanticized. Love comes from within as a consequence of a conscious deliberate act, not as a matter of fate, destiny, or a deus ex machina. As if to call attention to this nontranscendent quality of love, *The Setting Sun* includes two instances of "unfulfilled love." The first is in the recollection by Kazuko of her meeting with the friendly young officer during her stint at manual labor. This man shows her special consideration, sparing her from hard work and lending her a book to read, but their silent tearful parting ends "just like that, and the young officer never again appeared at the place where I worked" (41). The more important nonrealization of love is of course that of Naoji for Suga, where the "impossibility" is also deliberate on Naoji's part. Indeed, his "resolve to give her up [leads him] to direct the flames in my breast toward another object and recklessly [throw] myself into wild orgies with all sorts of women" (167).

This unrealizable combination of Suga and Naoji, within the structure of the novel, masks two other "impossible" matches, which, on a grid of possible combinations, would constitute the horizons of Japan's postwar period. They are an incestuous union of Naoji and his mother and a homosexual one of Naoji and Uehara. Suga has already been described in the previous section as, in Naoji's terms, an aristocrat as noble "as Mama" (163). As a surrogate for Mother, she becomes the "desired" but unrealizable line of descent. Via Kazuko's textual invention, she carries the baby that would confirm the union of noble and noble into the future generations. This continuation of the line, however, is bracketed by the text.

And so is the other extreme, the male–male union of noble and peasant, an impossible joining not only because of the lack of offspring but because of *ressentiment*. And it is here that the façade even of Romantic unrequited love and suffering that otherwise seems to characterize Naoji begins to crumble. For his resolve to give Suga up does not derive from any sense of immorality but from fear of Uehara: "That half-mad, no, virtual maniac of an artist terrifed me" (167). This admission comes toward the end of a tirade of abuse—this "idiot-hedonist," "clever businessman" artist, "shameless country boor"—directed at Uehara under what Naoji himself calls "a thin disguise achieved by the use of false

names" (161). Uehara is both what Naoji wants to become and fears becoming, and in this sense homosexuality is an appropriate metaphor for self-identity. That Naoji and Uehara may be seen as two aspects of Dazai himself only reinforces Dazai's perception of self-identity as an unstable and kaleidoscopic process, one concealing unresolvable, schizophrenic gaps.

These horizons of the text then ground the ultimate willful resolution of Kazuko as surrogate for the impossible combination. According to Kazuko, it is men's incapacity to reproduce by themselves that leads to war and peace, politics and conflict. The production of "healthy babies" out of dying, decadent men promises a new conception of humanity. Although the male, Naoji, cannot participate in the physical transformation of his blood with another aristocrat, he can, through self-sacrifice and delegation of surrogate powers, assure a partial transmission. Kazuko on her part, although unable to be a revolutionary, can through her body serve as the catalyst and carrier of that process.

But, we may ask, why is revolution "reduced" here to personal revolt via abortive class miscegenation? The answer may lie in the shape of the horizons bordering the postwar episteme. The frustration characteristic of Japanese Marxism from its inception in Japan through its suppression in the 1930s and the "reverse course" after the war, the indifference of and friction with international movements, and the endemic lack of a popular base—all these factors may have contributed to the quasi-mystical aura in which revolution as an apocalyptic, seismic event came to be viewed. The very fact of the movement's survival into the postwar, causing it involuntarily to share in the pervasive myth of rebirth with the American Occupation as the divine midwife, led it also to question the sources of its own vitality. The past, however, is, from the writer's perspective, "under erasure," even if it is only "decadent" writers like Dazai and Sakaguchi Ango who indicate that this is the case. The writer and intellectual can cross out or erase the past, but that very sign of erasure then speaks louder than words. Thus the vision of a postwar as "rupture" or "revolution"—accompanied inevitably by an aura of purity, chastity, and sanctity, or of mystical, virgin birth aided by the silent, invisible yet omnipresent god or *kami*, the Emperor (or his surrogate, the American-directed Supreme Command of the Allied Powers)—depends on a suppression of the enduring material components of Japanese daily life: class conflict and unfulfilled desire.

The male writer in particular in the postwar period, perhaps more than ever before, will identify his story with that of Japan's, and in so doing he will develop a paradigm of victim, outcast, marginal, minimal survivor. Here is a new version of the national allegory theme traced in the earlier development of modern Japanese literature. The phenomenon of

*tenkō*, with its spectrum of associations, but with a basic sense of rejection of the alien and a return to one's true self (as Japanese), will be stronger than many would like to admit. Just as Dazai's weighted definition of love as *eros* (*koi*) seeks to release the self from the fantasy of romantic love, *agape* (*ai*), so is there a liberating aspect to *tenkō bungaku*, which, through confession and return, seeks to privilege the concrete immediacy of the here and now—Japan and Japanese culture—over an abstract, idealized West and its elusive ideals, including Marxist equality.

Dazai does not, however, allow either *eros* or *tenkō* to become dominant over *agape* or revolution. In *The Setting Sun*, he maintains the aporetic aspect of both in the postwar period as in the prewar years by opposing romantic suicide to *tenkō* as *littératuricide*. *The Setting Sun*, in a move that is paradoxically consonant with the postwar situation of undecidability, ends with an unresolved "issue," which is that unborn baby in Kazuko's womb. Is it to be taken as the utopian, quasi-incestuous offspring of Naoji and Suga, thus forecasting transmission and reproduction of the fatal failure of the romantic paradigm of prewar Japan; or as the product of Kazuko and Uehara, that mix of chastened feminine optimism and calculating peasant intellectual? Or, in more recent terms, is it a pitting of the anachronistic romantic samurai against the cold bureaucratic businessman—or perhaps a premonitory sign of the emergence of that contemporary hybrid phenomenon, the "samurai businessman"? In *The Setting Sun*, however, the "issue" remains unborn and unresolved thanks to the text's rigorous maintenance of these aporias. It is these gaps between and within love and revolution, and between self and society in Japan, then, that give the novel its tension, as it reveals and makes self-conscious the postwar history of Japan.

# *Epilogue*

## POSTMODERN POSTMORTEM

Suicide is a phenomenon wherein the power of the past
is continuously bursting the frames within which
contemporary analysis seeks to enclose it.
—René Duchac, "Suicide au Japon"

### Modern Death and the Nuclear Sublime

Dazai's *The Setting Sun* was written under the cloud of nuclear fallout. Yet, like most Japanese under the United States Occupation, the author was not aware of the implications of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What the atom bomb and the Nazi Holocaust did to the human capacity for narration can only be guessed at, and yet there is little doubt that it was no longer possible to represent the world as before. Even in the face of modern technological mass destruction, it had still been possible and desirable, as Alvarez put it,[1] to believe in language, in the power of the artist, and in a notion of meaningful action directed toward overcoming the "Savage God" of death. In this "modern" perspective, moreover, the apparent conviction prevails that no matter how inconceivable the horror, these are the *willful* actions of human beings. There is evil in the world, but it is still contained, and hence presentable, within the metanarrative of good and justice versus evil.

In the postnuclear, postmodern era, however, strange things happen. Narrativity itself desists. Postmodernity has as one of its distinguishing characteristics the capacity and inclination to juxtapose polar opposites: the inhabitant of contemporary society accepts as a given the ready proximity of past and present, West and East, rich and poor, high and low culture, public and private, death and life. Only for some moreover, does the coexistence of unlimited possibilities with the potential for nuclear mass destruction render this situation a baffling dilemma.

A similar state of affairs was already apparent in high modernism,[2] yet one senses important differences with the postmodern context, differences, that are elucidated in Jean-François Lyotard's view of the "decline of narrative."[3] For Lyotard, the postmodern condition is characterized grammatically by a "future anterior mode" that seeks to "formulate the rules of what will have been done." The effect, however, is not to deny

or eliminate modern culture but to undermine the assumptions of progress and meaning upon which it is based.[4] As Terry Eagleton points out, in what seems like an effort to salvage modernism and with it the value of meaning via a transformed and "political" rationality, even "meaninglessnesses" are not equal: "There is a difference . . . between the "meaninglessness" fostered by some postmodernism, and the "meaninglessness" deliberately injected by some trends of avant-garde culture into bourgeois morality.[5]" In this sense, the "fragmentary or schizoid self" of modern Western culture, while fraught with contradictions, points to the passion with which modernism seeks to "deconstruct the unified subject of bourgeois humanism." Indeed for Eagleton, "the fact that modernism continues to struggle for meaning is exactly what makes it so interesting." Postmodernism, on the other hand, while "inheriting" the schizoid self from modernism, "eradicates all critical distance from it."[6]

The stupefying eclecticism of postmodern styles juxtaposes the most outrageous things, but unlike radical avant-gardes of high modernism, the shock value intended for the complacent bourgeois is now itself distanced, muted, inconsequential, and above all paradoxically unselfconscious. How, for example, can we distinguish between the cataclysmic horrors of the twentieth century, from poison gas to Nazi death camps to the atomic bomb, and the prospect of total nuclear annihilation? One might suggest that until the full impact of the nuclear threat became manifest, it was still possible to incorporate what Lyotard calls the "unpresentable" in a coherent narrative, an esthetic context, and confer on it an aura of legitimacy. But the thoroughgoing eclecticism of postmodernism collapses these horrors to pastiche. Hiroshima and Hitler both are turned into consumer kitsch (T-shirt emblems, sex shop playthings, kamikaze headbands) and even projected as aspects of a retrospective nostalgia. The space of postmodernity places the inconceivable and unpresentable—total nuclear destruction—next to an advertisement for diapers, and the effect is one of indifference. The willful evil of the modern state is transformed into contingent amorality.

Frances Ferguson finds an intriguing parallel between the difficulty of conceiving nuclear holocaust and the philosophical sublime: "[T]he notion of the sublime is continuous with the notion of nuclear holocaust: to think the sublime would be to think the unthinkable and to exist in one's own existence."[7] Following Kant, Ferguson defines the sublime as a "species of experience that explicitly does not ground itself in objects." Sublime objects are those that are "great beyond all measure" such that, unlike objects of beauty, they "elude [our] apprehension." The sublime experience, moreover, is unique to the individual and cannot be transferred; furthermore, it eschews contingency and accident, as its goal is to ensure subjective control over an elusive environment. It is this quest for

control that leads Ferguson to see a connection between the sublime and suicide.

> The insistence in accounts of the sublime on the subject's determination of his own death comes to be a way of underscoring the sublime determination to remove itself from the world of objects subject to accidents. Thus when Schiller describes suicide, taking one's own death into one's own hands, as the inevitable outcome of the logic of the sublime, he is of course right: the outcome of the subject's search for self-determination is not the achievement of absolute freedom in positive form but rather the achievement of a freedom from the conditions of existence by means of one's nonexistence. (6)

Suicide also becomes the ultimate metaphor of narrativity, suggesting the impossibility of both being there and telling the tale. The very effort to diminish contingency, however, has the effect of reducing the beholder of the sublime, the self-contained subjective consciousness, to the status of the *littératuricide* or symbolic suicide, whose capacity to tell the tale, because it derives from the failure to join the sublime (to die), results in a disenchantment (a sort of melancholic regret) with one's own waning creative and imaginative powers. Thus does Ferguson show how Jonathan Schell, author of *The Fate of the Earth*, the best-seller on the nuclear issue, in his evocation of the nuclear sublime, ends up focusing on more mundane, more "calculable" matters that have the effect of diminishing the intensity that led to them.

> The effort to think the nuclear sublime in terms of its absoluteness dwindles from the effort to imagine total annihilation to something very much like calculations of exactly how horrible daily life would be after a significant nuclear explosion. (7)

Ferguson identifies two aspects of the nuclear sublime that concern us in our effort to locate the possible specificity of suicide within Japanese postmodernism. First, she demonstrates how the inevitably anticlimactic rhetoric of the antinuclear movement focuses on the notion of accident. Almost more horrible than nuclear holocaust itself is the idea that it might happen unintentionally, by mistake. This notion of accidentalism is precisely what the eighteenth-century sublime sought to repudiate. And, for the individual subject intent on affirming individual identity by claiming a unique and irreplaceable subjectivity, it is the contemplation of suicide that comes to offer the only means of preempting the usurpation of control by contingency.

Second, Ferguson goes on to argue, on the basis of a suggestive parable she finds in the recent "rediscovery" of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, that "the nuclear sublime operates much like most other versions of the sublime, in that it imagines freedom to be threatened by a power that is

consistently mislocated" (9). From the eighteenth century to Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, the rhetoric of the sublime becomes that "nobler search for heroic encounter with the possibility of one's own death" which in fact masks the "world of generation" (i.e., "the world of society under the aegis of women and children" whose conditions—habit, custom, and familiarity—are so oppressive to the male subject). Ferguson attributes the current interest in *Frankenstein* to its "Gothic reversal of the sublime dream of self-affirmation, the fear that the presence of other people is totally invasive and erosive of self"(8). And this perception of a pervasive claustrophobia, which is what the esthetics of sublimity is designed to counter, can be said to inform Schell's rhetoric of a "cramped, claustrophobic isolation of a doomed present."

> He's right, of course, to want to preserve the planet, the human species, and human culture, but what is particularly striking about his imagery is its portrayal of nuclear threat as a temporal version of claustrophobia that is ultimately less terrifying than the Gothic claustrophobia repeatedly brought on by the pressure of the thought of other minds acting to condition an individual and his dream of the uniqueness of his consciousness. (9)

## National Suicide and Posthistorical Japan

What those who are concerned with the "fate of the earth" also reveal is the staying power of narrativity and one of its most distinctive products, national allegory. What is more, and what makes their concerns most relevant to this book, the nuclear horizon of present-day postmodernist discourse brings together the metaphors of nation and suicide, and the representative case in point is Japan.

In a discussion of the theory of nuclear deterrence, Dean MacCannell observes that "the [nuclear] leader must exhibit an absolute *will* to use nuclear weapons even in the full knowledge that their use almost certainly means genocide and suicide." He cites the words of a nuclear analyst: "The enemy should be made aware that . . . danger may get out of hand. National suicide, then, is possible."[8] A student of Japan, familiar with its wartime depiction as an irrational totalitarian monster bent on destruction, cannot help but be struck by the overtones here. That the logic of deterrence, like the logic of war, leads to the acceptance of the possibility of self-destruction is familiar. What is blatant in the nuclear analyst's remark, though, is the crassly strategic nature of the argument, which in effect posits not so much the specter of total annihilation as a postexistence that the leaders themselves have the best chance of attaining. The concept of national suicide, then (as in wartime Japan, where even most kamikaze pilots, until they entered the "closed world" of in-

evitability, were at best reluctant heroes), is not seen as a way of collectively preempting a nuclear holocaust, but rather of assuring survival and domination for the privileged elite.[9]

The association of suicide with Japan has been linked in numerous instances with the motivations of an irrational leadership: the insinuation that the atom bomb was somehow just punishment for unacceptable behavior is an allusion to a presumed Japanese predilection for bringing about collective death and self-destruction. Let us consider this manner of essentializing Japan in what has become one of the more infamous footnotes to history.

Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968), the Marxist philosopher and exegete of Hegel, includes in a footnote to his second edition of *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* an extended meditation on the "disappearance of Man at the end of History." For Kojève in 1948, "the Hegelian-Marxist end of history was not yet to come, but was already present, here and now."[10] And in this "post-historical period," it appeared to him that the " 'American way of life' " was the paradigmatic life-style, "the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the 'eternal present' future of all of humanity." Kojève viewed the United States at this point as, incredibly, "the classless society" of Marxism, one in which humans had become "post-historical animals" whose needs were satisfied and, hence, who no longer required a discursive "*understanding* of the World and of self" (161). But in 1959, after a visit to Japan, Kojève had what he called "a radical change of opinion on this point," leading him to write what may be one of the most startling accounts of Orientalism in the twentieth century.

> There I was able to observe a Society that is one of a kind, because it alone has for almost three centuries experienced life at the "end of History"—that is, in the absence of all civil or external war . . . "Post-historical" Japanese civilization undertook ways diametrically opposed to the "American way". . . . *Snobbery* in its pure form created disciplines negating the "natural" or animal given which in effectiveness far surpassed those that arose, in Japan or elsewhere, from "historical" Action. . . . [A]ll Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally formalized values—that is, values completely empty of all "human" content in the "historical" sense. Thus, in the extreme, *every Japanese is in principle without exception capable of committing, from pure snobbery, a perfectly "gratuitous" suicide . . . which has nothing to do with the risk of life in a Fight waged for the sake of "historical" values that have social or political content. This seems to allow one to believe that the recently begun interaction between Japan and the Western world will finally lead not to a rebarbarization of the Japanese but to a "Japanization" of the Westerners.* (161–162, emphasis added)

In his final paragraph, Kojève extends his view of posthistorical humanity in a projection that seems to anticipate postmodernism and to relate his evocation of "gratuitous" suicide to a postmodern view of Mishima Yukio's death in 1970 by seppuku.

> Now, since no animal can be a snob, every "Japanized" post-historical period would be specifically human. Hence there would be no "definitive annihilation" of Man properly so-called. . . . To remain human, Man must remain a "Subject *opposed* to the Object". . . . This means that . . . post-historical Man must continue to *detach* "form" from "content," doing so no longer in order actively to transform the latter, but so that he may *oppose* himself as a pure "form" to himself and to others taken as a "content" of any sort. (162)

The correspondence here between a posthistorical period and a postmodern style relies on a view of Japanese suicide in which the subject, as both individual and nation, cancels itself out "gratuitously," as pure form, much in the same way suggested by sympathetic Western "readings" of Mishima's suicide as an exemplary instance of the "nobility of failure."[11]

Kojève's notion of gratuitous suicide, or suicide as pure form, resonates with Roland Barthes's view of Japan a mere twelve years later as an "empire of empty signs." Barthes's ability to view Japan as a series of empty signifiers was possible, as he himself acknowledged, only as an outsider unable or unwilling to glimpse the "inside" of oppression and struggle. In this way, he was able to find in a photograph of General Nogi Maresuke and his wife prior to their double suicide (see Chapter One, note 27) an instance of a free-floating signifier, or in Kojève's words, a case of pure form and formality opposed to itself. It is also an appeal to us as readers/voyeurs to be in complicity with their knowledge of their own deaths, to accept the possibility that we too can see ourselves as already dead.

Both Kojève and Barthes "discover" a distinctively Japanese "postmodernism" through their own fascination with a particular attitude toward death. What appeals to them, however, is not only the idea of complete control over one's self-destruction but the notion of collective, national suicide. The implication is that all members of the Japanese empire are but empty signs able to erase themselves in what becomes in the late twentieth century a specifically postmodern variety of suicide.

## Postmodern Suicidal Narrative

The case of Mishima Yukio is suggestive. In the years since his death, he has come to be seen less as a hero of antimodernism than as a pastiche of postmodernism. And in this process of national and international "jump-

cutting" from Japan are apparent several of the elements associated with postmodernism in the West.

The distinction between a postmodern "weak" thought (*il pensiero debole*) and a modern metaphysical "strong" thought developed by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo[12] would seem to parallel the opposition between a typically alienated and suicidal writer like Dazai against the strong-minded samurai determination of Mishima. "Strong" thought is characterized as domineering, universalistic, atemporal, intolerant, and unaffected by memory or nostalgia, whereas "weak" thought leans toward Heideggerian "rethinking" (*Andenken*), healing, and acceptance. The characteristics of weakness, when applied to hermeneutics by Gadamer, involve sensitivity to the "inner demands of the object of interpretation, respect for its essential fragility, willingness to listen to what it says before questioning it, and renewed efforts not to impose on it one's own 'rationality' or convictions."[13]

One might argue that Dazai's life of suicidal obsession, including his five attempts, numerous literary accounts and speculations on those attempts, and a final ambiguous "love suicide," is suggestive of a weak, endlessly hypothesizing hero, whereas Mishima's meticulously planned and executed seppuku, no less than his punctilious writing habits and style, conveys the quintessence of strong thought. Typing of this kind is precarious, of course, especially when the "strong" Mishima identifies the "modern" writer as characteristically weak. Mishima's own views on the modern writer received their most venomous expression in his comments on Dazai, whom he likened to a pseudo-invalid for whom he prescribed "cold water massages": "An invalid who does not wish to recover does not qualify as a true invalid."[14] For Mishima, moreover, Dazai was the exemplar of the "modern Japanese novelist, an ugly cripple whose exterior has been deformed by the mind's poison."[15]

It is clear that Vattimo's opposition between a postmodern "weak" thought and a modern "strong" thought tends, as the descriptive terms suggest, to privilege the former over the latter. And it is tempting to see Dazai—notwithstanding Mishima's labeling of him as pathologically modern—as a precursor of postmodernity. Certainly in this book, I have argued the case for a Dazai narrative that resists hermeneutic closure in a variety of ways, whether by generating multiple suicides, second deaths, impossible loves—or in Dazai's words an "endless string of commas." In so doing, I too am clearly privileging what appears in Dazai's texts to be a sensitivity to the "inner demands of the object of interpretation" and a resistance to "impos[ing] on it one's own 'rationality' or convictions."

Yet, what I would like to argue in closing is something a bit different. If postmodernity does suggest a new perspective, it is one in which polar opposites of the type modern/antimodern are no longer meaningful.

Thus, rather than see Mishima and Dazai—and their suicides—as opposites poles of the Japanese socio-literary spectrum, what we note in a postmodern perspective is precisely a collapsing of such oppositions, so that modern and antimodern, strong and weak thought, Mishima and Dazai, and so on, occupy the same space without differentiation and without hierarchization. Moreover, in the perspective of a postmodern collapsed narrativity, Dazai's radical schizoid style is no longer that of a modernist subversiveness but merely an anodyne correlative of Mishima. And Mishima's ponderous self-aggrandizement—previously so discomfiting to Japanese and foreign statesmen—seems now defused of its threating "antimodernism." To be sure, both writers seek to "postnarrate," by way of their "pre-posthumous" writings, and they do so in the direction of their individual "deathscripts," a "strong suicide" for Mishima, a "weak" one for Dazai. Thus does Mishima wish to distinguish a "suicide as art," one that "activates a writer's entire works," from a Dazai-like suicide, which he sees as the disease of weak-willed, would-be writers.

> I don't recognize the notion of a writer's suicide. Suicide and art are as opposed as disease and medicine. If the medicine [art] is lousy, it won't cure the disease. . . . I hate people who commit suicide.[16]

What is collapsed in a postmodern perspective is not just the Dazai–Mishima polarity but the very need or desire to assert a difference. In the postmodern space, especially in the mass media, extremes, opposites, paradoxes, anomalies, inside and outside—all and anything, in other words—are equally "presentable" without, as Lyotard says, the "transcendental illusion of unity."[17] This kind of open-ended eclecticism, one that so resolutely eschews syncretism, becomes so dominant that by the 1980s it is not uncommon for foreign writers to see the seppuku of Mishima as a parody of itself.

> His death was to be a warning . . . to the modern world, debased and degraded in the eyes of all those who believe they are alive although they do not know how to die. . . . But that world marked him in spite of himself, as his final act so complicitously testifies: a public/publicity exploit, the trivium of the century, immediately consumed by the society of the spectacle, duly spiced with that pornography of violence with which the media screens are more and more avidly filled. A comparison of Mishima's boisterous death with that of a true soldier in the pure tradition like Nogi reveals what it is that perturbs and unsettles. Kitsch and retro: the tradition today is no more than a parody of itself.[18]

Where Pinguet sees parody, however, and appears to privilege that different truer past of a "pure tradition," we may prefer to see Jameson's postmodern "pastiche," the successor to modernist "parody."

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.[19]

## Japanese Postmodernism and the Persistence of Suicidal Narrative

The preeminence of Japan as a most exemplary instance of postmodernity is very much a part of a political as well as an esthetic discourse that feeds into (and is generated by) two persisting metanarratives: of an unrepentant modernization on the one hand and of a premodernist nativism with atavistic overtones on the other. In other words, inasmuch as the modernization paradigm is still a vital narrative structuring device, it is clear that an opposition between modernity and its repressed antimodern ethos continues to "make a difference" both in Japanese literature and thought as well as in the way that the West "reads" Japan.[20]

Suicide, as a narrative instance within the metanarrative of modernization, may be seen to serve as a marker of the "difference that continues to make a difference," whereby those who conceive of and present Japan to themselves or others as a self-contained subject, have a stake in its being modern in a progressive (if alienated and nostalgic) mode. Where a modernist or Romantic point of view tended to focus on the death of the author-creator-artist as a Christ-like sacrificial gesture to humanity (or to one's readership), postmodernism appears to posit the deaths of both narrator-author *and* listener-reader. This move is implicit in the use of postmodern pastiche. The collapsed critical distance implied by Jameson's pastiche (the "statue with blind eyeballs") projects not just the death of the artist but above all and equally that of the audience as well. Barthes's seductive invitation of the Western reader to the Japanese "empire of empty signs" is part of the process of "Japanization of the Westerner" spoken of by Kojève. It involves the transformation of both author and audience by the image (newspaper and photograph) into the "pure snobbery" of surface form and prescient death.[21] The juxtaposition of incongruities and paradoxes designed (or contextualized) to induce unemotional elegance, refined indifference, requires an imaginary voyage into Lyotard's future anterior tense. It requires, in other words, seeing oneself *with the world* as having died and still continuing to exist—as part, therefore (and as Dazai the writer-narrator saw himself) of "a living dead."

Postmodernism, in its particular brand of materiality involving the ex-

ploitation of technological media capabilities to the utmost, pushes its audience to transcend its own fears by going beyond death, or at least controlling death, by fantasizing life after death while still undead. In literary terms, the reader is being asked to narrate his or her own story after the story is over.

Suicide, always already the conditioning factor for all narrative, now offers us the implicit paradigm of a postmodern narrativity. And it does so because of the way in which it reveals the complicity between artist and audience (and not a few critics) to generate a postnarrative narrative. This "postmodern suicide" as a metaphor for writing differs from "modern suicide" in that it posits the death of the narrator *in tandem* with the annihilation of the world. It thus makes suicide a *collective* act instead of an individual subjective one. Its perception of the world, or of the present viewed as the past from a future time, differs from conventional utopian/dystopian narratives with their exhortation to either appreciate the present or change it.

It is as if Dazai's cynicism about his contemporaries' belief in historical change had become incorporated into the system itself. Japanese critics in recent years describe a state and an economy that appear to grow and thrive with no purpose, no direction, no will, no struggle, and no resistance. While Americans have come to see Japan as an "economic miracle," a maturing power, and as "Number One," a critic like Asada Akira sees Japan "growing progressively more infantile."[22] What was perversity in Dazai has become a way of life for the Japanese system. The struggle for survival has become survival pure and simple, with no struggle. Thus, ironically, although the "Japan as Number One" syndrome should have marked the culminating point of Japan's modernization story, one senses that the narrative has not ended: it is rather that the Japanese story will now be written by forces beyond any writer's control, by an occidentalism impinging on a Japanese utopian sublime, and by the intrusive presence of that "world of generation" of women and children whose demands seem to be growing geometrically.

In this sense, even postmodernism appears as an accidental event of culture over which Japanese have no control. The postmodern, difficult enough to locate in its own genetic context of late Western capitalism, is all the more elusive in its Japanese evocation. It is distinguished by one of its enunciators, Karatani Kōjin, however, in a specifically non-Western locus.

> The Japanese postmodern has a different character [from its Western counterpart]. While it does involve a radical process just as in the West, the Japanese postmodern does not include that "resistance" so endemic to the Western world.[23]

Seeing Western postmodernism as a type of ultimate category of resistance, Karatani defines Japanese postmodernism as its opposite, a lack of resistance, which leads him ironically to adopt a Barthesian perspective: unlike the supreme signifier God of Western thought, Japan's ultimate signifier is the "degree zero." For Karatani, "in Japan, there is no construction to deconstruct," which is why postmodernity entered Japan without any resistance.

> A postmodern thought is but a consumable decor in a self-sufficient discursive space and functions ultimately only to further the development of consumer society. In Japanese society, where there was no "resistance" to this movement, concepts like absence of the subject or decentering do not have the intensity they might have in France. But precisely for this reason, Japanese consumer and information society accelerates its process of rotation without the slightest obstacle.[24]

Efforts to identify a specifically Japanese postmodernity lead critics to discover those elements of the Japanese "native tradition" that distinguish it from its Western counterpart, to erect a Japanese cultural generality that would account for this "difference." In what might appear to be quasi-neonativist fashion, and in a mode that cannot but recall Jameson's and Ahmad's discussion of "national allegory," Karatani turns this "lack of resistance" into its opposite, a distinctively Japanese, and hence non-Western notion of modernity, an "empty structure of power."

The effort to maintain a Japanese Other from within, albeit as a "weak thought" that need not set itself against a native or foreign metaphysical tradition, reinforces a view of Japan as a collective subject. And inasmuch as the existence of such a subject depends on its capacity to act in a cohesive manner, it should not be surprising that it is associated with suicide as the metaphor of ultimate control. Suicide represents the capacity of the subject to resist without resisting, to undermine emptiness itself, to preempt death and destruction, or undo the end of history itself.

Yet, all such advocative evocations of postmodernity—whether apocalyptic and Orientalist in a mystical Marxist manner like Kojève's, or "resistant to nonresistance" like Karatani's—end up, for all their collapsing of narrativities, as instances of a discursive process. In this discourse, they repress, preclude, elide, and marginalize both the undiminished vitality of advanced capitalist imperialism as well as the narrative possibilities for struggle and evolution. Moreover, for nations and peoples in daily struggle with Western and Japanese imperialism, it must come, if they hear about it, as a surprise to learn of such indifference and lack of resistance, or in narrative terms, that the game or story "is over." For the third world, the notion that Japan or the first world has no system, no structure, no content, no signifieds does not induce apathy so much as

vigilance. The view of postmodernity as a postnarrative, hence postpolitical, stage is itself seen as a threatening narrative ploy designed to defuse the potential of political struggle. Is it then mere coincidence that the notion of postmodernity is a product of a European and American intelligentsia at a time when the socialist experiment seems at a particularly low ebb, in its apparent inability in states from Europe to China to distinguish itself from its capitalist nemesis? This leveling of systemic differences and dulling of expectations is surely part of the postmodern phenomenon.

In the final analysis, Japan, with or without its postmodernity, remains an imperialist power striving to control increasingly large realms of the world's necessity. And the issue of postmodernism, catalyzed by the shadow of nuclear destruction, also masks a social and political reality in which differences and struggles and narratives promise to persist at least until the end of historical time.

It is perhaps appropriate to end this text on suicidal narrative with a mention of a type of art that seeks—in a very different way from Dazai—to subvert the inertia and closure of Japanese modernization. The value of a nuclear criticism is to reveal how postmodernity encourages an eliding of the political, a trivializing of the plight of the third world and an undermining of the hope so vital for struggle. It is no accident again that a specifically Japanese nuclear criticism, of the kind suggested by the lifework of the two artists of the atomic bomb, Iri and Toshi Maruki,[25] should direct us to refocus attention on the repressed subnarratives of the collapsed Western metanarrative. Their struggle to create a postnuclear, post-Holocaust vision of love and life provides hope that the narrative will not result in "real" death or suicide but will continue to be open-ended with a world of infinite storytelling possibilities.

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

1. The existence of two excellent and almost simultaneous biographies of Mishima again speak rather to his life-style and death than to his writing per se. See John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974) and Henry Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Delta, 1974).

2. Japanese scholars have found foreign study of Dazai of sufficient interest to publish a book devoted entirely to studies of Dazai published outside Japan. See Takeda Katsuhiko, *Dazai Osamu bungaku: kaigai no hyōka* (Sōrinsha, 1985). Two book-length works in English on Dazai are James A. O'Brien, *Dazai Osamu* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1975), and Phyllis I. Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985). Book chapters devoted to Dazai include Donald Keene, "Dazai Osamu," in his *Landscapes and Portraits: Appreciations of Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971); Donald Keene, "Dazai Osamu and the Burai-ha," in his *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), vol. 1; Masao Miyoshi, "Till Death Do Us Part—Dazai Osamu: The Setting Sun," in his *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Makoto Ueda, "Dazai Osamu," in his *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976). For further items, see the Selected Bibliography and the bibliographical listings in Takeda's *Dazai Osamu bungaku* and Lyons's *The Saga of Dazai Osamu*.

Japanese studies of Dazai have turned into a veritable industry. There are bibliographies, compendiums, dictionaries, concordances, numerous biographies, albums, and critical works, collections of criticism, and at least two periodicals devoted exclusively to Dazai. The most current is *Dazai Osamu*, an annual, published by Yōyōsha since 1985.

3. "June Nineteenth" (*Rokugatsu jūkyūnichi*), in *Dazai Osamu zenshū*, 10 vols. (Chikuma Shobō, 1958), 10: 152. Subsequent references to this edition of Dazai's collected works are given with the shortened form *Zenshū*.

4. Kamei Katsuichirō, "Dazai Osamu no hito to sakuhin," in *Kindai bungaku kanshō kōza 19: Dazai Osamu*, ed. Kamei (Kadokawa Shoten, 1959), 10.

5. Saegusa Yasutaka, *Dazai Osamu to sono shōgai* (Shinbisha, 1965), 74.

6. Ibid., 81.

7. Okuno Takeo, *Dazai Osamu ron* (Kadokawa Shoten, 1972), 78.

8. Saegusa, *Shōgai*, 79–80, and Kamei, ed., *Kindai bungaku kanshō kōza 19: Dazai Osamu*, 8.

9. "For Fifteen Years" (*Jūgonenkan*), in *Zenshū*, 8: 213.

10. Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 80.

11. "Students United" (*Gakuseigun*), quoted in Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 83–84.

12. "Eight Views of Tokyo" (*Tōkyō hakkei*), in *Nihon no bungaku*, vol. 65: *Dazai Osamu* (Chūō Kōronsha, 1964), 146.

13. Saegusa Yasutaka, *Shisō to shite no sensō taiken* (Ōfūsha, 1962), 23. The Party was suppressed in 1932.

14. *Ningen shikkaku* (1947), published in English as *No Longer Human*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: New Directions, 1958), 65–66.

15. Saegusa, *Shōgai*, 90.

16. Saegusa, *Sensō taiken*, 31.

17. Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 87. For a discussion of Dazai's involvement with communism, see Keene, *Dawn to the West* 1: 1032–1035.

18. Kamei, *Dazai Osamu*, 12.

19. "Eight Views of Tokyo," in *Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 147.

20. Saegusa, *Sensō taiken*, 101.

21. This is a modified version of Donald Keene's translation from his "The Artistry of Dazai Osamu," *East-West Review* 1 (Winter 1965): 245. *Declining Years*, published in 1936, included the majority of stories produced by Dazai since he began to write, including "Leaves," "Metamorphosis," and "Reminiscences," which are discussed in the present work. See also the discussion in Chapter Six.

22. "Blue-Eyed Bonze" (*Hekigan takuhatsu*), in *Zenshū*, 10: 57.

23. Saegusa, *Shōgai*, 140.

24. "Family Happiness" (*Katei no kōfuku*), in *Zenshū*, 9: 275.

25. For an account of Dazai's "love suicide" with Yamazaki, see Saegusa, *Shōgai*, 206–234.

26. See *Nihon bungaku no rekishi* (Chūō Kōronsha, 1964), 12: 376.

27. Kamei, *Dazai Osamu*, 12.

28. Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 10. See the discussion of Okuno's view of Dazai as Jesus in Chapter Four.

29. Paul de Man develops this argument in "Shelley Disfigured," in *Deconstruction and Criticism* by Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979). See also the discussion in Chapter Five.

30. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 138.

## Chapter One

1. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65–88; Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,' " *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 3–25.

2. See the series of six volumes in "Studies in the Modernization of Japan" published by Princeton University Press between 1965 and 1971. Three of these are of particular relevance: *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (1965); *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan*, ed. Ronald P. Dore (1967); and *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald Shively (1971).

The best analysis of modernization theory in relation to Japan is still John Dower's extended introduction to his re-edition of the works of the neglected historian, E. H. Norman. See his "E. H. Norman, Japan, and the Uses of History," in *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: The Selected Writings of E. H. Norman*, ed. Dower (New York: Random House, 1975), esp. 65–90.

3. Dower's critique of modernization theorists includes American efforts to influence the field of Japanese studies not only in the United States but in Japan as well, where the goal was "to penetrate the Japanese intellectual scene . . . and break the influence of Marxist, or anti-American and anti-capitalist thought" (*Origins of the Modern Japanese State*, 49). Ironically the effort to proffer Japan as a nonsocialist model for the third world proved to be untenable in the light of Japan's historically specific conditions. For a Japanese view of these issues, see Kinbara Samon, *"Nihon kindaika" ron no rekishi-zō* (Chūō University Press, 1974).

4. Donald Keene, "Introduction" to his *Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology*, comp. and ed. Keene (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 14.

5. See Marleigh G. Ryan, *The Development of Realism in the Fiction of Tsubouchi Shōyō* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), as well as her translation and study, *Japan's First Modern Novel: Ukigumo of Futabatei Shimei* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

6. Richard Bowring, *Mori Ōgai and the Modernization of Japanese Literature* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 62.

7. Albert Craig and Ezra Vogel, "Preface" to Takeo Doi, *The Psychological World of Natsume Sōseki*, trans. William J. Tyler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

8. See Howard S. Hibbett, "Sōseki and the Psychological Novel," in *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 306; and Doi, *The Psychological World of Natsume Sōseki*.

9. Hibbett, "Sōseki," 306. See also Jay Rubin's translation of Natsume Sōseki's "My Individualism" (*Watakushi no kojinshugi*) and his introduction, "Sōseki on Individualism," in *Monumenta Nipponica* 34 (1979): 21–48.

10. Donald Keene, "Japanese Literature," in *An Introduction to Japanese Civilization*, ed. Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Heath, 1974), 417.

11. See James B. Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930–1938* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966).

12. John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), esp. 212–215 on Sōseki.

13. Masao Miyoshi argues that Ryan's "conviction that the Japanese are emotional and illogical in contrast to Westerners" leads her to the problematic assertion that Westerners are guilty of "literary imperialism." See his "Modern Japanese Fiction in the United States," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39 (1979): 436.

14. J. Thomas Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions: An Introduction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 4.

15. William F. Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 28 (1968): 169.

16. William F. Sibley, review of *The Failure of Freedom* by Tatsuo Arima, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 31 (1971): 248.

17. Ibid., 282.

18. Cited by Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Discovering the Lost Lives of Women," *New York Times Book Review*, June 24, 1984.

19. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, chap. 1.

20. See J. Victor Koschmann, "The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique," *Pacific Affairs* 54 (Winter 1981–1982), 609–631.

21. Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism After 1850* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 229.

22. Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (1958; reprint, New York: Athenum, 1967), 36.

23. Roland Barthes describes the palace grounds as hiding a "sacred 'nothing' " and as "inhabited by an emperor who is never seen, which is to say, literally, by no one knows who." *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 30–32. See also Asada Akira's provocative analysis "Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism: A Fairy Tale," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (Summer 1988): 629–634. Asada draws a parallel between Japanese capitalist management and the emperor as a "passive medium . . . reflected in the city structure which has an empty center" (632).

24. See the exchange in *Social Text* prompted by Jameson's article, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (Fall 1986). Ahmad responded in Fall 1987 with "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,' " which was followed by Jameson's "A Brief Response." (See note 1 above.)

25. See Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987).

26. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), chaps. 1 and 2. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

27. For a discussion of Nogi Maresuke's life and death, see the chapter "The Emperor's Samurai," in *Six Lives Six Deaths: Portraits from Modern Japan* by Robert Jay Lifton, Shūichi Katō, and Michael R. Reich (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979). The fascination with the Nogis' deathly prescience is made a focal point by Roland Barthes in his discussion of the famous last photograph of the Nogis one day before their suicides. See Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 92–93, and note the caption: "They are going to die, they know it, and this is not seen."

28. Mori Ōgai, *The Incident at Sakai and Other Stories*, trans. David Dilworth and Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977), 108. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

29. "Egoistic suicide results from man's no longer finding a basis for existence in life. . . . [Anomic suicide] results from man's activity's lacking regulation and

his consequent sufferings. . . . Both spring from society's insufficient presence in individuals." Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1951), 258.

30. Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro: A Novel*, trans. Edwin McClellan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957), 246.

31. Ibid., 129.

32. Nakamura Mitsuo, *Modern Japanese Fiction 1926–1968* (Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1969), part 2, 54.

33. Miyamoto Kenji, "Literature of Defeat" (*Haiboku no uta*), cited in Howard S. Hibbett, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the Negative Ideal," in *Personality in Japanese History*, ed., Albert Craig and Donald Shively (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 450–451.

34. " 'I felt as though the spirit of the Meiji era had begun with the Emperor and had ended with him. I was overcome with the feeling that I and the others, who had been brought up in that era, were now left behind to live as anachronisms.' " Sōseki, *Kokoro*, 245–246.

35. Nakasone, upon learning that Mishima's suicide had taken place on Defense Ministry property, found it "a terrible imposition." For these and other political responses to the incident, see Fujimoto Kazuko, "Mishima Yukio: Death of a Modernist," *Concerned Theatre Japan* 4 (1974):128–147. See also sections on Mishima by Ōhara Kenshirō and Hasegawa Izumi in "Sakka to jisatsu," special edition on "writers and suicide" of *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 36, no. 15 (December 1971): 189–190.

36. Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, 27.

37. Robert George Sewell, "The Theme of Suicide: A Study of Human Values in Japanese and Western Literature" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1976), 3–4. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

38. George A. De Vos, *Socialization for Achievement: Essays on the Cultural Psychology of the Japanese* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

39. Given that the genre of autobiography itself is highly suspect, such that "the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but that it is undecidable" [Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," in his *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 70], one would expect social scientists to be more skeptical of such an avowedly literary genre as the *shishōsetsu*. See also Candace Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism," *Diacritics* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 2–16.

40. Maurice Pinguet, *La mort volontaire au Japon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 315.

41. "Au moment où l'Orient 'entre' sur la scène de notre histoire, il y a plus que jamais à nous prévenir de ce que, peut-être, nous n'avons jamais voulu savoir. [Il nous faut] envisager le mode d'énonciation [de produits culturels non-occidentaux] . . . étrangement, et comme *underground*, notre modernité même, éclatée, critique." ("At this point in time as the Orient 'makes its entrance' on the stage of our history, we need more than ever to alert ourselves to that which,

perhaps, we have never wanted to know. [We must] picture to ourselves the enunciative modes [of non-Western cultural products] . . . , strangely, and as 'underground,' our very modernity itself, exploded, critical.") Julia Kristeva, *La traversée des signes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), back cover.

42. Alvarez, *The Savage God*, part 3.

43. Donald Keene, trans., *Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

44. Ibid., 29. The Chinese aphorism comes from the classic *Li Chi*. The setting of the play is fourteenth-century Japan but is understood to refer to the mid-eighteenth century, when the play was written.

45. See the account of Mishima's disappointment and of his gracious congratulations to Kawabata in Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography*, 203–204, 227–229.

46. Introduction to Keene's translation of Dazai's *The Setting Sun* (New York: New Directions, 1956), xii. Keene's scholarly project is suggested by the title of his recent prodigious study of modern Japanese literature, *Dawn to the West*.

47. Ivan Morris, *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), xi. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

48. Yamazaki Masakazu, "Rejecting the Mishima Legacy," *Look Japan*, February 10, 1981.

49. Ian Buruma, "Rambo-san," *New York Review of Books*, October 10, 1985.

50. Pinguet, *La mort volontaire au Japon*, 315. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

51. Pinguet's book is incidentally dedicated "to the memory of Roland Barthes," himself the "subject" of an "ambiguous" death.

52. "The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power" was "essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself." Suicide had been seen as criminal because it usurped this power of death of the monarch or of God. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 138.

53. "On February 26 of this year, several young officers attempted a coup d'état in Tokyo. On that day I was sitting with a guest, and we were warming ourselves over a hibachi and talking. Totally oblivious to the incident, we talked about women's nightgowns." ["Of Women" (*Mesu ni tsuite*), in *Nijisseiki kishu* (Shinchōsha, 1972), 108.]

54. "An Almanac of Agony" (*Kunō no nenkan*), in *Zenshū*, 8: 207.

55. See the discussion in Chapter Five of Dazai's fragment in "Leaves" recounting a decision to postpone his suicide in order to wear a gift kimono intended for summer use.

56. "Patriotism" (*Yūkoku*), trans. Geoffrey W. Sargent, in Mishima's *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1966).

## Chapter Two

1. See Ōhara and Hasegawa, "Sakka to jisatsu." Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

2. "[T]he *shishōsetsu* writer is never free of the temptation of suicide." Mi-

yoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 139. See also the discussion of the I-novel in Chapter Four.

3. See Chapter One, note 35.

4. René Duchac, "Suicide au Japon, suicide à la japonaise," *Revue française de sociologie* 5 (1964): 402–415. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

5. Erwin Stengel, "Suicide," *Encyclopedia Brittanica* (1982), 17: 777–779. For a detailed discussion of postwar Japanese suicide statistics, see De Vos, *Socialization for Achievement*, 455–462. For the prewar period, see Jean Stoetzel, *Without the Chrysanthemum and the Sword: A Study of the Attitudes of Youth in Post-War Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955).

6. Stengel, "Suicide," 778.

7. Sewell, "The Theme of Suicide," 200.

8. "Orient and Occident cannot be taken here as 'realities'. . . . Japan has afforded [the author] a situation of writing . . . in which a certain disturbance of the person occurs, a subversion of earlier readings." Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 3–4.

9. Edward Said demonstrates the persistence of Orientalism in Europe and the United States in chapter 3 of *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

10. The phrase is Miyoshi's, *Accomplices of Silence*, xi. See also my discussion in Chapter Four.

11. A "postmodern" suicide may be formulatable in terms of "that from which" one is reappropriating one's self—the modern state or nuclear destruction. See the discussion of the postmodern and suicide in the Epilogue.

12. Stengel, "Suicide," 777.

13. Quoted in ibid., 779.

14. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 138. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

15. Textual undecidability is a key component of poststructuralist criticism, one that recalls the contemporary history of interpretive intention, from the "intentional fallacy" to the "death of the author." See W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), and Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979).

16. "Histories . . . combine a certain amount of data, theoretical concepts . . . , and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in the past." Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), x.

17. Melvyn D. Faber, "Shakespeare's Suicides: Some Historic, Dramatic, and Psychological Reflections," in *Essays in Self-Destruction*, ed. Edwin S. Shneidman (New York: Science House, 1967), 35.

18. See "Artist Ends Her Life After Ritual Citing 'Self-Termination' Right," *New York Times*, June 17, 1979; and Ellen Goodman, "Suicide: Painting the Last Brushstroke on Life's Portrait," *Ithaca Journal*, June 22, 1979.

19. For what is probably the most vivid account of Mishima's death, see chapter 1, "The Last Day," of Scott-Stokes's biography, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, 27–54.

20. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 91.

21. Quoted by Denzell Smith, "Superior Norwegian Suicides," *Rendezvous* 15, no. 2 (1980): 26.

22. Quoted by James L. Foy and Stephen J. Rojcewicz, Jr., "Dostoevsky and Suicide," *Confinia Psychiat.* 22 (1979): 70.

23. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, xi.

24. See Chapter One, note 38. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

25. Alvarez, *The Savage God*, x.

26. Poem recited by Audre Lorde at conference of black women poets, May 1984, at the Hult Center, Eugene, Oregon.

27. As a "failed suicide," Alvarez falls under the technical definition of "suicide," which includes "persons who attempt to take, or have a tendency to take, their own lives." Stengel, "Suicide," 777.

28. "I want the book to start, *as it ends*, with a detailed case-history" (Alvarez, *The Savage God*, x, emphasis added). "And perhaps because *I too was a member of the club*, she talked also about suicide in much the same way" (17, emphasis added). In neither instance has Alvarez indicated explicitly that he attempted suicide, nor does he do so until the epilogue, which begins: "After all this, I have to admit that I am a failed suicide" (257). Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

29. Alvarez gives partial credit for this "distortion" to "the great sociologist, Emile Durkheim," whose "influence on the lesser men who followed him has been curiously deadening" (ibid., 89).

30. This type of Orientalism is also to be found among anthropologists like Frazer (1854–1941), who, after referring repeatedly to the incomprehensible Eastern indifference to death, finds in the Roman case that the very same attitudes help to explain how such a great Empire was founded. See Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 12 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1922), 12: 144.

31. These include "some of the most distinguished men of the ancient world" (Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 61). Alvarez himself here lists over thirty while noting that Donne's list ran to three pages. See Alvarez's own list of twentieth-century suicides as well (228), cited subsequently in the present chapter.

32. "A Custom of the Island of Cea," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1948), 255.

33. Ibid., 259–260.

34. This sentence appears on page 228 of the Penguin edition (Middlesex, England, 1975) but has been dropped from the Bantam version.

35. After Plath's first suicide attempt, Alvarez writes: "She had paid her dues, qualified as a survivor and could now write about it" (*The Savage God*, 36).

36. Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism," 11.

37. Ibid.

38. De Vos, *Socialization for Achievement*, 484, emphasis added. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

39. Ibid., 474.

40. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 178.

41. Sewell, "The Theme of Suicide," 3.

42. The "theory of *ressentiment*" is applied to the Japanese context in Chapter Eight.

## Chapter Three

1. Thus does Masao Miyoshi contend that the Japanese novel, "itself an imported form," will realize itself fully only when "the imported life itself has truly taken root in Japan" (*Accomplices of Silence*, 54).

2. Ibid., xi.

3. Noriko Mizuta Lippit, *Reality and Fiction in Japanese Literature* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1980), 16.

4. The purported association appears singularly evocative in the case of modern Japanese literature, confirmed, as it were, by a statistically based propensity for suicide among Japanese writers and artists. See the discussion of Ōhara Kenshirō on "writers and suicide" in Chapter Two.

5. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 85-86.

6. Mori Jōji, "The Liberation of Japanese Ghosts," in *Listening to Japan: A Japanese Anthology*, ed. Jackson H. Bailey (New York: Praeger, 1973), 21–67. This is a significantly reduced version of *Nihon no yūrei no kaihō* (Shōbunsha, 1974), which devotes a chapter (157–180) to Sakaguchi Ango and Dazai Osamu. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

7. For a revealing account of the socialization process served by the tale, see Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1983).

8. "Sea Gull" (*Kamome*), in *Zenshū*, 3: 79.

9. On the literary mainstream, see Edward Seidensticker, "Recent Trends in Japanese Literature," *The Oriental Economist* 27 (January 1959): 34–35, and the discussion of Seidensticker in Chapter Four.

10. Lippit, *Reality and Fiction*, 70.

11. Mori Jōji, *Nihon no yūrei no kaihō*, 175.

12. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

13. See Ueda, "Dazai Osamu," in his *Modern Japanese Writers*, 172.

14. Writer Tanaka Hidemitsu (Eikō), who committed suicide at Dazai's grave in Mitaka one year after the latter's own death, is the most famous case of a Dazai-inspired death.

15. Cited by Wada Yoshie in "*Ningen shikkaku* no furusato—Dazai Osamu bungaku to iu dokuhana no utsukushisa," *Shinfujin*, no. 6 (1958): n.p.

16. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1966), 116–118.

17. Ibid., 117.

18. See Hirosue Tamotsu, "The Secret Ritual of the Place of Evil," *Concerned Theatre Japan* 2 (1972):1–2.

19. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 117.

20. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

21. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 116.

22. See Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 1: 1025.

23. *Nihon bungaku no rekishi* (Chūō Kōronsha, 1964), 12: 360.

24. Dazai Osamu, letter to Ibuse Masuji of January 15, 1946, in *Zenshū* (1972 ed.), 11: 279–280.

25. "Response to a Response" (*Henji no henji*), in *Zenshū*, 10: 307.

26. A detailed discussion of the terms *burai* and *buraiha* is to be found in Hasegawa Izumi's introductory article to "Burai bungaku no keifu," a special issue of *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 35, no. 12 (1970). See also Sekii Mitsuo's discussion of the term *buraiha* in *Yōrei ni miru kindai bungakushi yōgo jiten* (Shiseidō, 1970).

27. See Burai Bungaku Kenkyūkai, ed., *Buraiha no bungaku: kenkyū to jiten*, esp. 318–322. The definitive acceptance of the term *buraiha* in literary circles is considered to have occurred when the dean of Buraiha critics Okuno Takeo used it as a chapter heading ("Buraiha no bungaku") in his *Dazai Osamu ron*. In 1967, Okuno jokingly disclaimed credit for this honor, suggesting that he merely made use of the term since it was already in circulation in the early 1950s. See "Shōwa jūnendai sakka no 'sengo,' " in *Nihon bungaku no sengo* (Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1967).

28. Michel Foucault, "Discourse on Language," *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 126.

29. *Nihon bungaku no rekishi*, 12: 386.

30. Dazai, "Pandora's Box" (*Pandora no hako*), in *Zenshū*, 8: 95.

31. "Kami," *Ooru yomimono* (November 1945), as quoted in *Nihon bungaku no rekishi*, 12: 343. Indicative of Buraiha "consistency" is the fact that Oda wore his hair long from high school on, once growing it back after having it cut by military police during a reservist round-up inspection in 1944.

32. Sakaguchi Ango, "My View of Japanese Culture" (*Nihon bunka shikan*), in his *Darakuron* (Kadokawa Bunko, 1972), 9.

33. Sakaguchi, "On Decadence" (*Darakuron*), in *Darakuron*, 88.

34. Ibid., 91.

35. *Nihon bungaku no rekishi*, 12: 360.

36. Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron* (rev. ed.), 116–118.

37. Ibid., 118.

38. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

## Chapter Four

1. Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism." Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

2. The notion of an impossible *dédoublement* would also seem to set the stage for that further fictional irony of "dying twice," discussed in Chapter Five.

3. Louis A. Renza, "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 292.

4. "The choice of this particular part of the body . . . was based on an old anatomical belief as to the seat of the soul and of the affections" [Inazo Nitobe, *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Inazo Nitobe* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1972), 92]. "The cutting open of one's stomach [seppuku or harakiri] was thought to give convincing visual and symbolic proof of the purity of one's soul" (Robert Sewell, "The Theme of Suicide," 57). See also the "exemplary" case of Satō Tadanobu in *The Chronicle of Yoshitsune*, trans. Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966).

5. The calm and irresistible logic of "the closed world of suicide" described by Alvarez in *The Savage God* (116 and passim), in which "every detail fits," is no better exemplified than in the case of the kamikaze suicide pilot, discussed in Ivan Morris's *The Nobility of Failure*, 276–334. It is also, however, "perverted, upside-down" and in this respect similar to the identity development of adolescents, which involves "a sense of the irreversibility of significant events" (Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 116), and which suggests autobiographical writing, in that a "process can be understood when it is retraced in its steps and thus reversed in thought" [Erik H. Erikson, "Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," in his *The Challenge of Youth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 14]. Erikson's attribution of a realization of "historical fatality" suggests the autobiographer's projected death of a false self in favor of a surviving true self, although in many cases just the opposite may be the writer's stated intention. See also the discussion of *tenkō* and *littératuricide* in Chapter Six.

6. Janet Walker, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), vii.

7. The construct of the "self" would appear to offer a paradigmatic instance of the infinitely regressive nature of all language, as demonstrated by Friedrich Nietzsche in his "Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense," where the purported referent of even ostensibly concrete terms like "serpent" turn out to be metaphorical ad infinitum. See the French version, "Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Écrits posthumes 1870–1873*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 275–290.

8. Seidensticker, "Recent Trends in Japanese Literature," 34. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

9. Katō Hidetoshi, "Soybean Curd and Brine," in *Listening to Japan*, ed. Bailey, 3–5.

10. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, x.

11. The analogy with *tōfu* can be justified here in the light of warnings that

the preservatives in *tōfu* posed a danger to people's health. See Takahashi Kōsei, "Why Japanese Ham Won't Rot," *Ampo: Japan-Asia Quarterly Review* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 56–63.

12. Bowring, *Mori Ōgai and the Modernization of Japanese Culture*, 223–224.

13. Seidensticker, "Recent Trends in Japanese Literature," 35.

14. Ibid.

15. Lippit, *Reality and Fiction*, 2–4.

16. Howard Hibbett, "The Portrait of the Artist in Japanese Fiction," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 14 (May 1955): 347–354; Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 128n; Walker, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period*, 13.

17. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, xx; Seidensticker ("Recent Trends in Japanese Literature," 34) cites Itō Sei's example of Shiga Naoya, whose literary revelation of an illicit affair led to a marital crisis.

18. See Herbert Bix, "Imagistic Historiography and the Reinterpretation of Japanese Imperialism," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7, no. 3 (July-September 1975): 51–68. In his critique of Akira Iriye's *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921–1931* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), Bix argues that the tendency to view nation-states as discreet, coherent, independent units engaging in reciprocal exchange and competition for their mutual benefit ("national interests") parallels the abstract notion of "free individuals" in liberal democratic theories of society.

19. Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 10.

20. Seidensticker, "Recent Trends in Japanese Literature," 34.

21. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 125n.

22. Since 1974, when *Accomplices of Silence* was published, Miyoshi has emphasized the need to focus on more indigenous and distinctively Japanese developments. See his *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States (1860)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) and among his recent writings, "Against the Native Grain: The Japanese Novel and the 'Postmodern' West," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (Summer 1988): 525–550. Subsequent page references to *Accomplices of Silence* appear in the text in parentheses.

23. Phyllis Lyons, " 'Art *Is* Me': Dazai Osamu's Narrative Voice as a Permeable Self," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41 (1981): 93–110. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses. See also her *Saga of Dazai Osamu*.

24. See Inatomi Eijiro, *Nihonjin to Nihon bunka*, 73, cited by Lyons, " 'Art *Is* Me,' " 93.

25. This statement calls to mind Mori Jōji's approach to modern Japanese literature, which he calls the "liberation of Japanese ghosts" (see Chapter Three).

26. It is noteworthy that at least one Japanese critic responded with "resistance and embarrassment" to Barthes's vision of Japan. Shinoda Kōichirō, identifying himself as someone who "after all leads my life within the confines of the phenomenon" described by Barthes, dared the Frenchman to "come and live in this country where the signifier rules without a signified" ["Roran Baruto oboegaki," *Kōzō to gengo: kaku koto no ronri* (Gendai Hyōronsha, 1978), 216].

27. Opposed to this universalist view is Fredric Jameson's, for whom "the fo-

cus of human consciousness and the mechanisms of human psychology are not timeless and everywhere essentially the same, but rather situation-specific and historically produced." The implications of this perspective for criticism are to focus attention on the reader/critic as much as on the text. "It follows, then, that neither the reader's reception of a particular narrative, nor the . . . representation of human figures or agents, can be taken to be constants of narrative analysis but must themselves ruthlessly be historicized" (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 152).

28. *The Setting Sun*, 156–157. See discussions of "An Almanac of Agony" in Chapter Seven and of *The Setting Sun* in Chapter Eight.

29. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 131–132.

30. Ibid., 132.

31. Ibid., xi–xii.

32. One need not go far, since the novel is based on the personal diary given to Dazai by Ōta Shizuko, who, like Kazuko, did have an affair with the "notorious" writer—Dazai Osamu—and became pregnant. See her *Shayō nikki* (Ishigari Shobō, 1948).

33. Miyoshi does not see Kazuko as an aspect of Dazai, although she is the narrator and protagonist; he sees her rather as a counterpoint to the male characters and as a voice excusing their behavior (*Accomplices of Silence*, 132; subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses).

34. See E. S. Burt, "Poetic Conceit: The Self-Portrait and Mirrors of Ink," *Diacritics* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 17–39, where he discusses Michel Beaujour's *Miroirs d'encre.*

35. Aeba Takao, *Dazai Osamu ron* (Kōdansha, 1976), 3–5.

36. Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism," 12.

37. Linda Hutcheon, "A Poetics of Postmodernism?" *Diacritics* 13 (Winter 1983): 34. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

38. Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 1: 246.

39. Iwanaga Yutaka, *Shizenshugi bungaku ni okeru kyokō no kanōsei* (Ōfūsha, 1968), 234. Quoted in Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 1: 246. Emphasis added.

40. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 136.

41. "An Almanac of Agony," in *Zenshū*, 8: 203–204.

42. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, xvi.

43. Aeba, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 1. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

## Chapter Five

1. Donald Keene suggests how much of a craftsman Dazai was and how much anxiety he suffered over his art in "The Artistry of Dazai Osamu," *East-West Review* 1 (Winter 1965): 241–253. Dazai's letter of March 1, 1933, to Kiyama Kempei, which makes mention of "Metamorphosis," is indicative of his concern about the writer's craft. "A writer should have the overall conception well laid out and the conclusion well in mind before beginning to write . . . it could turn out quite

badly if he veers even a bit from the course leading to the conclusion" [in *Zenshū* (1972 ed.), 11: 15–16].

2. "Gyofukuki" in [*Zenshū*, 1: 61–70] was originally published in March 1933 in the inaugural issue of *Azarashi* (Seal). The English version, "Metamorphosis," translated by Thomas Harper, appeared in *Japan Quarterly* 17 (1970): 285–288. Ueda Akinari's story of 1768, "The Carp That Came to My Dream" (*Muō no rigyō*), is translated and annotated by Leon M. Zolbrod in *Ugetsu Monogatari: Tales of Moonlight and Rain* (Toronto: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974), 132–138. Dazai's title derives from the original Chinese tale upon which Ueda's story is based and literally means "a tale of fish clothing." Subsequent page references in the text are to Harper's translation.

3. Suwa's recollections include being told this folk tale by her father while being held in his arms. The story involves two woodcutter brothers, Saburō and Hachirō, who are separated from each other when Hachirō turns into a scaly river serpent.

4. "Eight Views of Tokyo," in *Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 147.

5. See Moriyasu Masafumi's discussion of Dazai's morbid fascination with water and its archetypal ramifications in his article titled "Gyofukuki," in his *Dazai Osamu no kenkyū* (Shinseisha, 1968), 201–218.

6. " 'Gyofukuki' ni tsuite," in *Zenshū* (1972 ed.), vol. 12. The constraints of the master–disciple relationship may also be a factor here, as the following suggests: "This story was the beginning of my life as a writer, although when it aroused an unexpected public response, Ibuse [Dazai's mentor] was surprised. Up until then he had been discreetly correcting my crude provincialisms, but now he looked troubled and said to me, 'It really should not have done so well. I wouldn't let it go to your head. It might be some kind of mistake' " ["For Fifteen Years" (1946), in *Zenshū*, 8: 216].

7. Letter to Kiyama Kempei, *Zenshū* (1972 ed.), 11: 15.

8. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 160–177. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

9. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 38–39, cited in Jameson, ibid., 168.

10. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), and "Shelley Disfigured," in *Deconstruction and Criticism* by Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 67.

11. de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 67.

12. "A Faint Voice" (*Kasuka na koe*), quoted in Makoto Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 155.

13. "Leaves," in *Zenshū*, 1: 5.

14. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 127.

15. The association of writing with kimono cloth evokes a linguistically unrelated play on the Latin-derived "text" (weave) metaphor. Dazai, through his narrative of the summer kimono in "Leaves," equated the weaving with the telling, thus making both contextual to his decision not to die.

16. The English translator, Barbara Johnson, in discussing the difficulty of translating Derrida, finds in this instance a felicitous "sympathy." "One might almost believe . . . that . . . *Dissemination* had been waiting all along for the English homonymy between 'sow' and 'sew' to surface" (*Dissemination*, "Translator's Introduction," xix).

17. Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 42–43. Cited by Johnson in Derrida's *Dissemination*, xvii.

18. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 127.

19. "This (therefore) will not have been a book" (Derrida, *Dissemination*, 3).

20. Usui Yoshimi, "Dazai Osamu ron," in *Dazai Osamu kenkyū*, vol. 1, ed. Okuno Takeo (Chikuma Shobō, 1978).

21. Ōmori Morikazu, "*Bannen*," in *Dazai Osamu no kenkyū*, ed. Moriyasu, 122.

22. "Sea Gull" (*Kamome*), in *Zenshū*, 3: 79.

23. Kamei, ed., *Kindai bungaku kanshō kōza 19: Dazai Osamu*, 61.

24. See Chapter Four for a discussion of the Romantic foundations of autobiography as elaborated by Lang in her "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism."

25. Okuno, *Dazai Osamu ron*, 136.

26. "Eight Views of Tokyo," in *Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 149.

27. "Reminiscences" (*Omoide*), in *Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 23–24.

28. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Camus* (London: Fontana, 1970), 14.

29. Albert Camus, "Avant-Propos," *L'Étranger* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), vii.

30. Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, 160.

31. Ibid., 161.

32. Germaine Brée, *Camus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1964), 113.

33. "Reminiscences," 13. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

34. Cited in Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 1: 1038–1039.

35. Ibid., 1027–1028.

## Chapter Six

1. Dazai considered this to be the last work of a man who was old before his time, much as the 25-year-old "old man" of his story "Regression" (*Gyakkō*, 1935), which was included in *Declining Years*, and for which he was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize.

2. Page references in parentheses after translations throughout this chapter are to the Japanese text of "Eight Views of Tokyo" in *Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 146–152, unless otherwise indicated.

3. Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, 15.

4. Tatsuo Arima, *The Failure of Freedom: A Portrait of Modern Japanese Intellectuals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

5. The goal of the "process" is rarely made explicit, although a reading of the Princeton Modernization Series and related texts will reveal that Japan's course

has consistently been seen to be in the direction of a Western capitalist polity. See Chapter One, notes 2 and 3.

6. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 10.

7. See George M. Beckmann and Genji Okubo, *The Japanese Communist Party, 1922–1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969).

8. Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyūkai, ed., *Kyōdō kenkyū: tenkō*, 3 vols. (Heibonsha, 1959–1962), 1: 5.

9. Fukumoto's *Hōkō tenkan* is discussed in Fujita Shōzō, "Shōwa hachinen o chūshin to suru tenkō no jōkyō," in *Kyōdō kenkyū: tenkō*, 1: 31–65.

10. Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction*, 54.

11. See Honda Shūgo, *Monogatari sengo Nihon bungakushi* (Shinchōsha, 1966), 59–64.

12. Nakano Shigeharu, *Three Works by Nakano Shigeharu*, trans. Brett de Bary (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, China-Japan Program, 1979), 19–73.

13. *Haniya Yutaka sakuhin-shū* (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1971), vol. 2.

14. Cited by Tsurumi Shunsuke, "Kyomushugi no keisei—Haniya Yutaka," in *Kyōdō kenkyū: tenkō*, 1: 64.

15. Ibid. See also Yoshimoto Takaaki, "Tenkōron," in his *Geijutsuteki teikō to zasetsu* (Miraisha, 1975), 169–193.

16. Masao Miyoshi describes Haniya's writing as "often a torrent of intellectualisms without reference to experience, and thus . . . nearly unreadable" (*Accomplices of Silence*, xv). Yet Haniya, to his admirers, remains one of only a few Japanese writers who have grappled, bodily as it were, with the repressive force of language.

17. Honda Shūgo, *Tenkō bungaku ron* (Miraisha, 1957).

18. Saegusa, *Dazai Osamu to sono shōgai*, 96.

19. Kamei, ed., *Kindai bungaku kanshō kōza 19: Dazai Osamu*, 13.

20. Oda Makoto has spoken to the Japanese need to balance a self-image of "victim" relative to the West with one of "oppressor" in relation to Asia and Japanese minorities ["The Ethics of Peace," in *Authority and the Individual in Japan: Citizen Protest in Historical Perspective*, ed. J. Victor Koschmann (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1978), 154–170]. It is also intriguing to note that at least one Dazai critic has sought in Dazai the capacity to combine these two sensitivities: "My reason for writing about Dazai was to see how we, who had suffered as victims for so long under this prolonged period of the postwar, have now come to be oppressors." Shimizu Akira, *Dazai Osamu ron* (Shichōsha, 1979), 227. This attitude to Japan's militarism and the war is reproduced by filmmakers as well. See, for example, Oshima Nagisa's *Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no korida*), in which the war is reduced to a single background shot of marching soldiers set against the obsessively erotic closed world of passion of Abe Sada and her lover.

## Chapter Seven

1. See Chapter Five, note 10.

2. Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 66.

3. *Nihon bungaku no rekishi*, 12: 342–344.

4. Edward Seidensticker, *Kafū the Scribbler: The Life and Writings of Nagai Kafū, 1877–1959* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1965), 339–344.

5. *Nippon Times*, August 16, 1945, 2:1. This English-language publication, predecessor to today's *Japan Times*, appeared from January 1943 until June 1956 and included summaries and translations from the Japanese-language press. Subsequent references are included in the text in parentheses with the abbreviation *NT*.

6. John Dower's *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986) provides an exhaustive account of cross-cultural stereotyping by both the American and the Japanese sides through World War II.

7. For a reproduction of this remarkable example of racist journalism, replete with photographs, see Sheila Johnson's analysis in her *American Attitudes Toward Japan, 1941–1975* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 7-10.

8. See the discussion of Sakaguchi Ango's "On Decadence" (*Darakuron* ) in Chapter Three.

9. Seidensticker, *Kafū the Scribbler*, 156.

10. "Sengo Nihon ni okeru shakai to kojin," cited in Sakuta Keiichi, "The Controversy over Community and Autonomy," in *Authority and the Individual in Japan: Citizen Protest in Historical Perspective*, ed. J. Victor Koschmann (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1978), 224–225.

11. Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction*, 47.

12. Thomas Havens has taken the term "dark valley" as the title for his book describing the social conditions of the times. See *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War Two* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 6.

13. Keene, "The Barren Years: Japanese War Literature," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33 (1978): 67–112.

14. John Dower demonstrates how this gloomy/bright dichotomy is an integral part of Japanese modernization studies in their shift from negative to positive readings of Japan's modern history. See Dower, "E. H. Norman, Japan, and the Uses of History," esp. 43–65.

15. Keene, "The Barren Years," 68.

16. For a detailed account of the situation confronting publishing and its revival in 1945, see Fukushima Jūrō, *Sengo zasshi hakkutsu* (Edeitā Yōsho, 1972).

17. See Brett de Bary, "Five Writers and the End of the War: Themes in Early Postwar Japanese Fiction" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978).

18. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 74.

19. Honda, *Monogatari sengo Nihon bungakushi*, 12.

20. Edward Deming was only in the 1980s sought out by United States firms and asked to teach Americans what he, as an American consultant, taught the Japanese after World War II. The irony is apparent in a 1980s film produced by the Weyerhauser Corporation titled "If Japan Can, Why Can't We?"

21. "An Almanac of Agony," in *Zenshū*, 8: 201. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

22. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970). See also Barbara Johnson's dis-

cussion in chapter 1 of *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

23. Mikhail Bakhtin (V. N. Voloshinov), *Marxism and The Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), 23.

24. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 102.

25. Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

26. "For Fifteen Years," in *Zenshū*, 8: 224. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

27. Jameson sets Lewis's activities within the context of "proto-fascism," which he describes "as shifting strategy of class alliances whereby an initially strong populist and anticapitalist impulse is gradually readapted to the ideological habits of a petty bourgeoisie. . . . Throughout its evolution, it remains a reaction to and a defense against the continuing ideological threat and presence of a (defeated) Marxism" (Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, 15).

28. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 88.

29. "I remember it was around twilight, and I was standing next to my aunt. . . . She told me that His Majesty the Emperor had departed this earth. A living god, she called him. I think I also muttered 'living god,' pretending to be deeply interested. Then I apparently said something disrespectful, because my aunt scolded me: 'You mustn't say that kind of thing. Say that he has "gone." ' I remember then that I made her laugh when I deliberately asked, though I knew very well, 'Where has he gone to?' " (*Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 13–14).

30. Tsutsumi Shigehisa, *Koi to kakumei: hyōden Dazai Osamu* (Kōdansha, 1973), 132–140.

31. The heroine of Dazai's story, "Villon's Wife" (*Buiyon no tsuma*, 1947), is another survivor. In the face of her husband's decadent behavior and the doldrums of the postwar period, she reiterates the theme in a classic statement: "There's nothing wrong with being a monster, is there? As long as we can stay alive" (Keene, *Modern Japanese Literature*, 414).

32. A. Broyard, review of *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* by Terrence Des Pres, *New York Times*, February 10, 1976.

33. *The Setting Sun*, 66.

## Chapter Eight

1. See also the Fall 1982 (8, no. 3) issue of *Diacritics*, "Special Issue on Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*," as well as Samuel Weber, "Capitalizing History: Notes on *The Political Unconscious*," *Diacritics* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 14–29, and Terry Eagleton, "The Idealism of American Criticism," *New Left Review* 127 (May-June, 1981): 53–65. Page references in the text are to Jameson's *Political Unconscious*.

2. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I:10, quoted in Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 201.

3. Translated by Ivan Morris in his *Modern Japanese Short Stories* (Rutland, Vt: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962), 464–480. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses. The readability of Morris's translation is offset, for the purposes of analysis, by a too-free rendering involving both omission (notably of al-

lusions to Christianity and Greek mythology) and excessive elaboration (Hirata hiccups many more times in translation).

4. The story of the formulation of the medieval epic *Tale of the Heike* reveals the upstream side of the warrior ideal. See William Butler, "The Textual Evolution of the *Heike monogatari*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 26 (1966): 5–51, who shows how individual heroic episodes were inserted or magnified to enhance the image of the cowardly combatant majority.

5. This sentence is omitted from Morris's translation and is here translated from the text in *Nihon no bungaku*, 65: 253. Morris's Hirata may be several degrees more comic than Dazai's, to judge by the fact that he takes a drink, hiccups before and after his recitation, and says that the poem is "something I read in a magazine" (Morris, *Modern Japanese Short Stories*, 479). None of these actions or statements appear in the Chūō Kōron text.

6. The idea of an intrusion into one's private, domestic space, to be equated with one's inner consciousness, sancrosanct mind, is the theme of Abe's 1969 play *Friends* [trans. Donald Keene, in *Contemporary Japanese Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Film, and Other Writing Since 1945*, ed. Howard S. Hibbett (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977)], in which a seemingly friendly "family" of eight enter the apartment of a typical young urban bachelor and progressively reduce him to the status of an animal before liquidating him. All of this, in the theater of the symbolic, takes place and derives its impact, as is the case in Abe's other works, from the rigidly conformist expectations of Japanese society about the rights and roles of groups and individuals.

7. Page 251 of the Chūō Kōron edition; omitted from Morris's translation.

8. Ibid.

9. *The Setting Sun*, Introduction, xv. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

10. See Georg Lukács, *Balzac et le réalisme français* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1967).

11. There is an added complication in the cross-cultural encounter of Western literary critics with Japanese literature. The appeal of Japanese "decadence" or aristocratic decline for many of the latter is homologous with the infatuation of many Japanese writers and critics with nineteenth-century European literature. It is, as it were, a nostalgia for a kind of "familiar" decadence, found in the nonthreatening literary ambience of postwar Japan, and to be contrasted perhaps with some of the more grisly tales of horror emerging from contemporary American society and dealt with by writers like Norman Mailer (*The Executioner's Song*) or Truman Capote (*In Cold Blood*).

12. The image of Japanese social life as a universe of silence, here called on by Keene in his introduction to "explain" Dazai's flashback techniques, is erected into a paradigm of the modern Japanese writer by Masao Miyoshi in his *Accomplices of Silence*.

13. Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 135.

14. Ibid., 136.

15. Ibid., 132. Yet, one wonders, might we not read Naoji's statement in his "Moonflower Journal" as an indication of Dazai's still-thriving perversity? "I will

write my novel clumsily, deliberately making a botch of it, just to see a smile of genuine pleasure on my friend's face" (*The Setting Sun*, 63).

16. Introduction, *The Setting Sun*, xviii.

17. *Accomplices of Silence*, xvi.

18. Thomas Rimer argues that "*The Setting Sun*, even while chronicling the death of the past, remains impregnated with it" (*Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions*, 189). Yet, the overall vision of a development harmoniously integrating past and present may cause the discourse to oscillate uneasily between a self-contained past and a transhistorical, transcultural universalism. In Rimer's words, "We [Westerner and Japanese] all share a culture that recognizes the symbolic significance of the unconscious. Dazai too inhabits that shared present [and] can be said to share fully in the painful world we have all made together" (188).

19. "Chance" (*Chansu*), in *Zenshū*, 8: 256, 260–261.

20. Morris, *The Nobility of Failure*.

21. Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 161. It is not entirely clear who the "inferiors" in this novel would be unless it is Uehara. Could he be the critic's (Ueda's) "commoner"—"physically energetic, mentally robust, and aesthetically crude?"

22. See Chapter Six, note 20.

23. The psycho-sexual symbolism of Toshio's encounter with the American Higgins in Nosaka Akiyuki's "American *hijiki*" (trans. Jay Rubin, in *Contemporary Japanese Literature*, ed. Hibbett) is illustrative of this syndrome.

24. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 200.

25. Ibid.

26. This line from Verlaine quoted by Dazai in his 1933 "Leaves" (in *Zenshū*, 1: 5) has guided critical readings of him ever since: "In me can be found both the rapture and the agony of the elect."

27. "Chance," in *Zenshū*, 8: 253.

28. Ibid., 255.

## EPILOGUE

1. Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 234–236. See the discussion in Chapter Two.

2. See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.

3. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 37.

4. Ibid., 81.

5. Terry Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism," *New Left Review* 152 (July-August 1985): 70.

6. Ibid., 72.

7. Frances Ferguson, "The Nuclear Sublime," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 7. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

8. Dean McCannell, "Baltimore in the Morning . . . After: On the Forms of Post-Nuclear Leadership," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 41.

9. See Alvarez's chapter on "The Closed World of Suicide" in *The Savage God*,

and Morris, "If Only We Might Fall . . . The Kamikaze Fighters," chapter 10 of *The Nobility of Failure*.

10. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 160. Subsequent page references appear in the text in parentheses.

11. Ivan Morris dedicates *The Nobility of Failure* to the memory of Mishima, "whose own last act . . . belongs squarely to the scenario of heroes as described in these chapters" (xi). See also my discussion in Chapter One.

12. See Matei Calinescu, "On Postmodernism," *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), 272.

13. Ibid., 273.

14. Quoted in Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography*, 123.

15. Quoted in Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 233.

16. Quoted in Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 179.

17. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81.

18. Pinguet, *La mort volontaire au Japon*, 314.

19. Jameson, "Postmodernism," 60.

20. On modernization theory and Japan, see the discussion in Chapter One.

21. In addition to the photo of the Nogis, see Barthes's vision of himself as an object/subject of "Japanization" (*Empire of Signs*, 90).

22. See Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One: Lessons For America* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1980) and Asada, "Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism," 631.

23. Karatani Kōjin, "Généalogie de la culture japonaise," in *Le magazine littéraire*, no. 216–217 (March 1985): 18–20.

24. Ibid.

25. See John Dower and John Junkerman's volume, *The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985), and the film by Dower and Junkerman, "Hellfire: A Journey From Hiroshima" (1985). See also Alan Wolfe, "Toward a Japanese-American Nuclear Criticism: The Art of Iri and Toshi Maruki in Text and Film," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 19, no. 4 (December 1987): 55–57.

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*Declining Years* (*Bannen*; vol. 1)
"Eight Views of Tokyo" (*Tōkyō hakkei*; vol. 4)
"For Fifteen Years" (*Jūgonenkan*; vol. 8)
"Good-bye" (*Guddo-bai*; vol. 9)
"Hell Without End" (*Mugen naraku*; vol. 12)
"Human Lost" (*HUMAN LOST*; vol. 2)
"June Nineteenth" (*Rokugatsu Jūkunichi*; vol. 10)
"A Landlord's Life" (*Jinushi ichiyo*; vol. 12)
"Leaves" (*Ha*; vol. 1)
"Metamorphosis" (*Gyofukuki*; vol. 1)
*No Longer Human* (*Ningen shikkaku*; vol. 9)
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"Regression" (*Gyakkō*; vol. 1)
"Reminiscences" (*Omoide*; vol. 1)
"Response to a Response" (*Henji no henji*; vol. 10)
*The Setting Sun* (*Shayō*; vol. 9)
"Song of Defeat" (*Haiboku no uta*; vol. 10)
"Standard-Bearer of the Twentieth Century" (*Nijūseiki kishu*; vol. 2)
"They and Their Beloved Mother" (*Karera to sono itoshiki haha*; vol. 12)
"Tsugaru" (*Tsugaru*; vol. 7)
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